

THE LORD'S SUPPER: A STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS
AND OF THE PRACTICE IN AMERICAN METHODISM

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This dissertation, written by

Don Kent Finch

*under the direction of _____ Faculty Committee,
and approved by its members, has been presented
to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of
Theology at Claremont in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of*

DOCTOR OF RELIGION

Faculty Committee

Paul D. B. B.

F. Thomas Trotter

Howard J. Chenevert, Jr.

Date

June 1968

F. Thomas Trotter
Dean

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the present practice of the Lord's Supper in American Methodism in light of its New Testament roots, the practice of John Wesley and of contemporary Methodists, and the symbolism of eating and drinking. From this study we will draw certain conclusions about the meaning and purpose of the Lord's Supper and suggest the types of practice which would be most conducive to this meaning.

Our methodology is to begin with an examination of the practice and then to proceed with an evaluation of its meaning. First is a study of the New Testament texts which report the institution of the Lord's Supper, followed by an examination of the "Breaking of Bread" passages and the resurrection appearances at meals, and finally a discussion of Jesus' normal table-fellowship. Secondly, we shall look at John Wesley's practice and doctrine of the Lord's Supper and see how this heritage has been treated in the history of American Methodism; the feelings of a small number of Methodist laymen will be solicited by means of a questionnaire and evaluated. We shall also discuss the symbolism of eating and drinking and its relevance for today. From the study of the New Testament roots, the Methodist heritage and present practice, and the symbolism of eating and drinking we

will draw conclusions about the central meaning and preferred practice.

CHAPTER I

THE LORD'S SUPPER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The most important texts in the New Testament which deal with the Lord's Supper are those concerning the institution of the practice by Jesus and the study of these passages will occupy the majority of this section. We shall also examine the "Breaking of Bread" passages and the resurrection appearances, especially at meals. We shall also say something about Jesus' normal table-fellowship since this is deemed to be an important element in the tradition of the Lord's Supper. Finally, an attempt to summarize the findings and draw conclusions concerning the Lord's Supper in the New Testament will bring this chapter to a close.

I. THE WORDS OF INSTITUTION

The passages in the New Testament which allegedly report of the institution of the Lord's Supper are I Corinthians 11:23-26, Mark 14:22-25, Matthew 26:26-29, and Luke 22:15-20. Although John 6:51-59 does not apparently contain a tradition of the words of institution, it is important for our study because of the sacramental language and ideas involved. Translations of the Pauline and Synoptic texts, which are arranged for easy comparison,

are found on page 5.

We shall begin our study with the Pauline text since it is oldest from a literary point of view, Paul having written his letter to the Corinthians around A.D. 54.¹ The language of these four verses indicates that they form a unit of material taken over from the tradition of the church. It appears that the majority of scholars believe that the use of ἀπὸ rather than παρά in verse 23 indicates that Paul received this from the tradition rather than from special revelation.² However if Roth is correct that these two prepositions are often used interchangeably,³ we cannot decide the matter on this basis. Certainly there are more important considerations. In the first place, "I received" (παρέλαβον) and "I delivered" (παρέδωκα) are technical terms which are used for the receiving and handing on of tradition (cf. I Cor. 15:1 ff.)⁴ Secondly, there are a number of

¹Joachim Jeremias, The Eucharistic Words of Jesus (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 138.

²F.W. Grosheide, Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 269.

³Robert Paul Roth, "Paradosis and Apokalupsis in I Corinthians 11:23," The Lutheran Quarterly, XII (February 1960), 64.

⁴Jeremias, op. cit., p. 101. Hans Lietzmann, Mass and Lord's Supper (Leiden: Brill, 1954) p. 208, and Oscar Cullmann, Essays on the Lord's Supper (Richmond: John

I Cor. 11:23-26

Mark 14:22-25

23 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was being delivered up took bread 24 and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way also the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes."

22 And as they were eating, he took bread and having said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them and said, "Take; this is my body." 23 And taking cup and having given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. 24 And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant which is shed for many. 25 Truly I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Matt. 26:26-29Luke 22:15-20

15 And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you that I shall no longer eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 And he took a cup and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this and share it with each other. 18 For I tell you, I shall not drink from now on of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.

26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread and having said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to the disciples he said, "Take, eat; this is my body." 27 And taking cup and having given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "All of you drink of it. 28 For this is my blood of the covenant which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 And I say to you, I shall not drink from now on of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it with you new in my Father's kingdom."

19 And he took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 20 And in the same way the cup after supper, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

idioms foreign to Paul in this text.

Only in I Cor. 11.23-25 do we find in Paul παρα-
 δίδοσθαι used absolutely, εὐχαριστεῖν
 used absolutely to designate grace at table, κλῆν
 without an object, καὶ εἶπεν, ἀνάμνησις
 (twice), μετὰ with infinitive used as a noun,
 δεῖπνεν, τοῦτο placed before the noun, δσάκεις
 (only I Cor. 11.25,26).⁵

Finally, the main words of this account, 'the body of
 Christ', are usually used by Paul in a different sense.
 "For the 'body of Christ' in Paul elsewhere designates
 not the earthly body of Jesus but the community."⁶ As
 Bultmann says,

Another indication that Paul found the liturgical
 words already in existence is the fact that they
 speak of a "communion" with the (body and the) blood
 of the Lord. Can Paul, for whom "flesh and blood"
 are excluded from the Reign of God (I Cor. 15:50),
 have created this text?

The language not only indicates that Paul took
 this over from the tradition, but shows the liturgical
 nature of the tradition. Robert H. Mounce says

Knox Press, 1958), p. 18, are representative of a number
 of scholars who believe that Paul is referring to a direct
 revelation from the Lord. That this interpretation is
 quite old is evidenced by the changing of "from the Lord"
 to "from God" in Manuscript G. However, the majority of
 scholars agree with the interpretation that the tradition
 of the church is meant.

⁵Jeremias, op. cit., p. 104.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament
 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), I, 150-151.

It will be immediately noticed that the style of the passage is elevated and liturgical. The opening phrase, *ο κύριος ἰησοῦς*, is by no means simple and narrative. It conveys the feeling of ceremonial proclamation. The absolute use of *παράδοσθαι* refers to the action of God in delivering up Jesus and is more than a mere statement of chronology. The article in front of *ποτήριον* points to the ritual "cup of blessing" (cf. I Corinthians 10:16). We are dealing with highly liturgical formula.⁸

Jeremias points out that the phrases "took bread and having given thanks broke" and "in the same way also the cup" have the character of liturgical rubrics.⁹ At any rate it is certain that the Sitz im Leben of the tradition in I Corinthians 11:23-26 is clearly the eucharistic practice of the early church.¹⁰

The context of this passage in I Corinthians shows that during Paul's time this sacramental meal followed a normal meal. Paul notes that when they come together they do not wait for each other but go ahead with their own meal, one man being hungry and another drunk (I Cor. 11:21). Therefore, Paul instructs them to wait for each other when they come together to eat, and if one is so

⁸Robert H. Mounce, "Continuity of the Primitive Tradition; Some Pre-Pauline Elements in I Corinthians," Interpretation, XIII (October 1959), 421.

⁹Jeremias, op. cit., p. 113.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 106.

hungry that he cannot wait, he should eat at home. The Pre-Pauline tradition of verses 23-26, however, shows a different relationship between the normal meal and the sacramental meal: namely, the breaking of the bread is first, followed by a normal meal, which is followed by the cup. This reminds us of a typical Jewish festal meal, which had the same order: the blessing of the bread at the beginning, then a meal, then the blessing of wine at the conclusion.¹¹

We may conclude then that the tradition of the Lord's Supper in I Corinthians 11:23-26 is Pre-Pauline and that its form represents the eucharistic liturgy of the early church which Paul knew---namely, that of Hellenistic Christianity. This sacramental meal is set within the framework of a normal meal. The phrase, "In the same way the cup after supper" (I Cor. 11:25) indicates that behind the sacrament of the Lord's Supper lies an ordinary Jewish fellowship meal.

Let us now turn to an investigation of the Markan passage, since it is next oldest from a literary point of view. Mark 14:22-25 is a unit which the author found in the tradition and wove into his account of the Passion Story. That verses 17-21 and verses 22-25 were not

¹¹Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 185.

originally contiguous is shown by the tension between "And as they were at table eating" (vs.18) and "And as they were eating" (vs.22).¹² Secondly, this account is not connected with what precedes it and says nothing about the preparations mentioned in verses 12-16.¹³ Also, the language of these verses is solemn and stylized---quite unlike Mark's plain narrative style.¹⁴ Finally, there are a number of words and constructions which Mark does not use anywhere else.¹⁵

Not only is the language and style non-Markan, but it is liturgical. The first half of verse 22 sounds like a liturgical rubric and "the fruit of the vine" (vs.25) is an established liturgical expression.¹⁶ "Having taken the cup and given thanks" (vs.23) is also a set phrase and "with $\lambda\alpha\beta\acute{\omega}\nu$ is meant thereby the elevation of the cup about a hand's breadth above the table . . ."¹⁷ So we see that in this account of the words of institution at the last supper, as in I Cor. 11:23-26, the writer had to revert to the ". . . liturgical formula, the wording of

¹²Rudolf Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 265.

¹³Jeremias, op. cit., p. 97.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 177.

which had long been fixed and everywhere established by the cult."¹⁸

Joachim Jeremias in his important book The Eucharistic Words of Jesus has provided convincing evidence that the original formulation of this unit of tradition taken over by Mark was in Aramaic or Hebrew.¹⁹ He lists twenty-three words, phrases and constructions behind which he believes lie semitisms and Palestinian idioms. For example, "having taken bread and blessed" (vs.22) ". . . is an established phrase for the action of the Jewish head of the household in the grace before meals" ²⁰ He says the word "broke" ". . . is a technical term for the Jewish practice of breaking the bread before the meal."²¹ These and his other examples prove that we are dealing with a translation into Greek from the Aramaic. The translation was quite literal---apparently done by someone who did not know Greek very well---and the language became part of the liturgy so was never changed. Mark then took over this tradition and incorporated it into his Gospel.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 187.

²⁰Ibid., p. 174.

²¹Ibid., p. 176.

Despite his excellent linguistic analysis, I do not believe we can draw the far-reaching conclusions which Jeremias draws---namely, that we have here a tradition which goes back to the actual event of the Last Supper which was a Passover meal and that we have the actual words of the historical Jesus.²² We can say that the Aramaic language lying behind Mark's text points us to ordinary Jewish table customs---e.g., the blessing and breaking of bread. But the sacramental idea of eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ, as well as the liturgical language of the text, indicate a formulation of the early church.

A comparison of Mark 14:22-25 with I Corinthians 11:23-26 reveals that we have two similar but independent accounts of the tradition of the Lord's Supper.²³ Although Paul does not have the eschatological saying of Jesus which Mark records (14:25), the eschatological idea is found in the concluding sentence: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (I Cor. 11:26) Mark of course does not have a parallel to Paul's statement, "For I received

²²Jeremias, op. cit., p.

²³A.J.B. Higgins, The Lord's Supper in the New Testament (London: SCM Press, 1952), p. 37.

from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was being delivered up" (I Cor. 11:23ab). Where Paul says "when he had given thanks" (εὐχαριστήσας), verse 24, Mark says "having said the blessing" (εὐλογήσας), verse 22. However, Mark has εὐχαριστήσας in connection with the cup, whereas Paul has neither in connection with the cup. To the phrase "This is my body" Paul adds "which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me;". Mark precedes the phrase with "Take, . . .". Where Paul says, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood", Mark has "this is my blood of the covenant which is shed for many." Other important differences can be discerned from a comparison of the texts.

The two texts vary according to the form of the liturgical formula familiar to each writer in his own church.²⁴ Although both texts have undergone "smoothing" in the course of their transmission, I believe that I Corinthians 11:23-26 represents the more primitive tradition. In discussing Gunther Bornkamm's article, "Herrenmahl und Kirche bei Paulus," ZThK, 53 (1956), R. H. Fuller

²⁴Karl Georg Kuhn, "The Lord's Supper and the Communal Meal at Qumran," in Krister Stendahl, ed., The Scrolls and the New Testament (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), p. 79.

says that Bornkamm concludes

. . . that the Pauline form of the eucharistic words is in part---notably in the cup-word and in the separation of bread and cup by the supper (meta to deipnesai)---more primitive than the Marcan.²⁵

The Pauline account is older because it represents the sacramental meal as being within the context of a regular meal, and is closer to a normal Jewish fellowship meal, whereas the Marcan account tells us of only one meal, sacramental in character.²⁶

Matthew 26:26-29 is very close to Mark 14:22-25 and Mark was obviously the source for the first evangelist. This is apparent because the account in Matthew attempts to improve and to make clearer Mark's text. Matthew replaces "he" with "Jesus" and "them" with "disciples" in verse 26. He replaces "Take; this is my body" with "Take, eat; This is my body." He changes Mark's statement that "they all drank of it" into the words of Jesus: "All of you drink of it." He begins the statement that "This is my blood of the covenant which is shed for many" with "For" and adds "for the forgiveness of sins", which is a

²⁵Reginald H. Fuller, "The Double Origin of the Eucharist," Biblical Research, VIII (1963), 63.

²⁶Hans Dieter Betz, Lecture entitled "The Last Supper" given in course, The Passion Narratives, October 21, 1965.

correct interpretation of his source. Regarding the oath of abstinence, Matthew replaces "again" with "from now on"; to "when I drink it" he adds "with you"; and instead of "the kingdom of God" he says "my Father's kingdom". Since Mark is the only source for this text, Matthew's account will shed little new light on the early traditions of the Lord's Supper.

The account in Luke 22:15-20 is a different story, for scholars cannot agree on the extent of the original text, nor on its sources. In his Theology of the New Testament, Bultmann says that Luke is dependent on both Mark and Paul and that it ". . . is not to be regarded as having the value of independent tradition in any of its forms."²⁷ Lietzmann says that Luke is a variant of Mark,²⁸ and R. D. Richardson, whose essay on the Lord's Supper is included in the English translation of Lietzmann's Mass and Lord's Supper, says that although the question of a source in addition to Mark remains open, it is not necessary to postulate a second source.²⁹ Jeremias says that

²⁷Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 146.

²⁸Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 177.

²⁹R.D. Richardson, "A Further Inquiry Into Eucharistic Origins with Special Reference to New Testament Problems," in Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 302.

the account comes from Luke's special source (Urlukas),³⁰ and that the entire longer text is authentic.³¹ According to R. H. Fuller, almost all German scholars since Dibelius accept the longer Lukan text as authentic.³² However, Bornkamm believes that Luke 22:15-18 is secondary,³³ while Bultmann says that verses 19-20 are an interpolation.³⁴ Since the list of scholars who are at odds regarding this text could be extended indefinitely, let us turn to an examination of the Lukan text and its comparison with I Cor. 11:23-26 and Mark 14:22-25.

First it seems to me that Jeremias has convincingly shown the authenticity of the long text (vv.15-20) rather than the shorter text (vv.15-19a).³⁵ The textual criticism appears to support this conclusion.³⁶ The second observation is that the account can easily be broken into two separate units of tradition (vv.15-18 and vv.19-20) on the basis of literary criticism. Verses 19 and 20

³⁰Jeremias, op. cit., p. 99. ³¹Ibid., p. 159.

³²Fuller, op. cit., p. 62.

³³Günther Bornkamm, Jesus of Nazareth (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), p. 211.

³⁴Bultmann, The History . . ., p. 266, n. 1.

³⁵Jeremias, op. cit., pp. 139-159.

³⁶Ibid., p. 152.

are liturgical formulae and are very similar to the Pauline text. As Jeremias says,

Paul and Luke exhibit themselves as related through the structure of the words over the wine, also in that they alone offer the phrase *μετὰ τὰ δεῖπνῆσαι* and the command to repeat the rite, and finally through the connection of the *ὑπέρ*-phrase with the word over the bread; . . .³⁷

Paul and Luke also have "the new covenant in my blood," whereas Mark and Matthew have "my blood of the covenant." There are also some affinities with Mark's account: concerning the bread, they both have "and gave it to them"; and regarding the cup, both have "which is poured out". However, the differences between Luke and Mark are greater than their similarities. We must conclude that in verses 19 and 20, Luke has incorporated a tradition similar to that in the Pauline text.

The first section (vv.15-18) contains the twin eschatological saying of Jesus, and since these verses are not deducible from Mark 14:25, Luke probably used his special source at this point.³⁸ Jeremias says,

The fact that the unit is stamped quite strongly with the linguistic and stylistic peculiarities of the Lukan source speaks decisively against the thesis that Luke 22.15-18 is an expansion of Mark 14:25 operated by Luke himself. Its distinguishing signs

³⁷Ibid., p. 164.

³⁸Kuhn, op. cit., p. 82.

are: καὶ ἐῖπεν as the opening of the pericope; ἐπιθουμῆν with the infinitive; λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν (twice); οὐ μὴ (twice); ἕως ὅτου; ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν. We possess, therefore, the so-called eschatological prospect in a twofold tradition: in a short form in Mark (/Matthew) and in a valuable longer form in Luke.³⁹

Although Günther Bornkamm believes that Luke 22:15-18 is secondary to Mark 14:25, stating that the texts are considerably similar,⁴⁰ he agrees as to the importance of the eschatological saying.⁴¹ Fuller follows him in contending ". . . for the historicity of the eschatological saying on the ground, so far from reflecting the liturgical tradition, it progressively disappears . . ."⁴²

According to R. H. Fuller, E. Schweizer believes

. . . that Luke 22:15-18 gives the more primitive account of what happened at the last supper . . . The Last Supper was a farewell meal in which Jesus spoke about his service to his disciples and spoke of the eschatological prospect of renewal of table fellowship with them in the kingdom of God.⁴³

Although the last statement that the last supper was a farewell meal is pure conjecture, it is true that Luke represents the last supper as being an eschatological banquet. There is no mention in verses 15-18 of Jesus'

³⁹Jeremias, op. cit., p. 161.

⁴⁰Bornkamm, op. cit., p. 211.

⁴¹Fuller, op. cit., p. 63.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., p. 62.

body or blood---only the eschatological sayings and the sharing of the cup.

Why did Luke include the tradition of the sacramental meal represented in verses 19-20, which is so similar to that of I Corinthians 11:23-26? We know that Luke is very conscientious in dealing with the tradition. We can therefore assume that he ". . . was under pressure of his knowledge of a rite actually practised in the churches of his acquaintance."⁴⁴

We have seen that it is Luke 22:15-18 that brings a new tradition to bear on our study of the Lord's Supper. Luke here represents the last supper as an eschatological meal---not a sacramental meal. The disciples do not share symbolically the body and blood of Jesus, but rather share in a fellowship meal. The Lukan account of the last supper points us back to a fellowship meal which Jesus shared with his disciples.

The Gospel of John at first glance appears to have no account of the institution of the Lord's Supper. At the place in the Passion Narrative where the synoptics have their accounts, John has placed the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet (Chapter 13). The reason for this substitution may be ". . . to stress the fact that

⁴⁴Richardson, op. cit., p. 304.

the Sacrament can be effective only when the spirit of the Master possesses the disciples."⁴⁵ This is of course conjecture.

John does use eucharistic ideas and symbols in John 6:51-59---for example, the use of the terms "flesh" (rather than "body" as in the Synoptics and Paul) and "blood". Therefore most scholars believe this passage to be important for any study of the Lord's Supper. J. H. Bernard goes so far as to say that 6:51c is an independent version of Jesus' word of interpretation over the bread.⁴⁶ In support of this point of view Jeremias sets forth the following comparison of the structure and content of John 6:51c and I Cor. 11:24b:⁴⁷

John 6:51c

the bread which I will give
is my flesh
for the life of the world

I Cor. 11:24b

this
is my body
which is for you

But as we have already discovered, the words of interpretation are a result of the liturgy of the early church and do not go back to the historical Jesus. Nor can I see where this version of the liturgy is especially

⁴⁵G.H.C. MacGregor, "The Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel," New Testament Studies, IX (January 1963) 113.

⁴⁶J.H. Bernard, Gospel According to St. John (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), I, p. clxx.

⁴⁷Jeremias, op. cit., p. 108.

ancient. In fact, the sacramentalism which we found in the synoptics and in Paul is carried one step further in John.⁴⁸ Bultmann, who believes that this passage is secondary in John, also stresses the sacramental nature of the text and notes that here even the effect of the sacrament is spelled out: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life." (vs.54).⁴⁹ Therefore, John 6:51-59 is of limited value in our attempt to understand the origin and early practice of the Lord's Supper.

The three texts regarding the institution of the Lord's Supper which are of greatest importance for this study are I Corinthians 11:23-26, Mark 14:22-25, and Luke 22:15-20. The Sitz im Leben for these passages is the worship of the early church. The fact that there are differences between them is due to the various forms of the liturgical text familiar to each writer in his own church.⁵⁰ In these forms the sacramental nature of the meal is in the forefront. It is Paul's view that by participating in the Lord's Supper we are incorporated into

⁴⁸Richardson, op. cit., p. 331.

⁴⁹Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 147.

⁵⁰Kuhn, op. cit., p. 79.

the body of Christ.⁵¹ I Corinthians 10:16-17 makes this clear:

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf.⁵²

The sacramental interpretation of the act is especially ". . . expressed in the repeated phrase 'this is,' by which bread and wine are offered the partaker as flesh and blood of Jesus."⁵³ As Bultmann says,

. . . The basic idea is that of sacramental communion ---communion of the partakers with the Kyrios. The question asked in this connection whether the sacrament bestows participation in the crucified physical body of Jesus or in the spiritual body of the exalted Christ is wrongly put. The "glory-body" of the exalted Christ is identical with the body put to death on the cross. That is just what the sacramental idea is: that the killed body of the cult-divinity is simultaneously the body filled with power and mighty in effect. This is also apparent in the warning at I Cor. 11:27: Whoever partakes unworthily of the sacramental body and the sacramental blood of the Kyrios makes himself guilty of the Lord's death.⁵⁴

The sacrament, then, is not only a remembrance of the atoning death of Jesus, but ". . . by eating and drinking

⁵¹Ernst Käsemann, "The Pauline Doctrine of the Lord's Supper," in his Essays on New Testament Themes (Naperville: Allenson, 1964), p. 111.

⁵²⁵³Bul
revised Standard Version.

⁵³Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 146.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 147.

he gives them a share in the atoning power of his death."⁵⁵ According to this tradition, the last supper was a meal at which Jesus spoke the words interpreting the bread and wine as his body and blood.

The traditions in Mark 14:22-25 and Luke 22:15-20 confirm the meaning of the Lord's Supper as participating in the body of Christ. As the bread and wine are shared and consumed together, the fellowship which occurs between the participants and Christ, their head, welds them into one body---the body of Christ. However, Mark 14:25 and especially Luke 22:15-18 emphasize an additional aspect of the tradition of the Lord's Supper---one which is referred to in I Corinthians 11:26 ("You proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.")---namely, the eschatological meaning. The sacrament is a meal ". . . partaken together, in joy and jubilation, in expectation of the coming of the Lord."⁵⁶ According to this tradition ". . . the Last Supper was a farewell meal in which Jesus spoke of the eschatological prospect of renewal of table fellowship with them in the kingdom of God."⁵⁷

Behind both the tradition of the last supper as a

⁵⁵Jeremias, op. cit., p. 233.

⁵⁶Bornkamm, Jesus of Nazareth, p. 188.

⁵⁷Fuller, op. cit., p. 62.

meal when Jesus pronounced the words connecting the bread and wine with his body and blood and the tradition of the last supper as an eschatological banquet, we see evidence of the fellowship meals which Jesus had with his disciples. First, although the words of interpretation are a creation of the early church, "the entire structure of the cult formula presupposes Jewish meal customs."⁵⁸ Secondly, the eschatological banquet is in fact a fellowship meal: a time when Jesus and his disciples "shared" with each other.

II. THE "BREAKING OF BREAD" AND THE RESURRECTION APPEARANCES

In addition to the texts which give us the tradition of Jesus' last supper with his disciples, the "breaking of bread" passages in Acts and the accounts of the resurrection appearances at meals help us understand the origin and early practice of the Lord's Supper.

Jeremias claims that the "breaking of bread" in Acts (2:42, 46; 20:7, 11) is a technical term for the Lord's Supper.⁵⁹ He says that one reason Luke used this phrase was to protect the sacred formula of the Supper,⁶⁰

⁵⁸Kuhn, op. cit., p. 81.

⁵⁹Jeremias, op. cit., p. 120. ⁶⁰Ibid., p. 133.

although this seems doubtful. In another place he says that the designation of the Lord's Supper as "breaking of bread" or "to break bread" may show traces of a celebration in one kind (sub una).⁶¹ Lietzmann also says that the "breaking of bread" refers to the eucharistic service of the church and that no wine was drunk on this occasion.⁶² However, the reason Jeremias gives for the celebration sub una is that the members were too poor to buy wine,⁶³ whereas Lietzmann claims that ". . . the very essence of the eucharist lay in the bread: whether one drank anything with it, or what one drank, was not of great moment."⁶⁴

It seems to me that the key to understanding these passages in Acts lies in another direction---one which, I might add, is not ignored by either Jeremias or Lietzmann. In Judaism, "breaking of bread" refers to the action of tearing the bread and the rite with which the meal is opened.⁶⁵ We have represented in Acts a joyous meal-celebration. As Bultmann says, ". . . there prevailed at these meals ἀγαλλίασις, 'gladness,'

⁶¹Ibid., p. 115. ⁶²Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 195.

⁶³Jeremias, op. cit., p. 115.

⁶⁴Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 200.

⁶⁵Jeremias, op. cit., pp. 119-120.

which probably means the mood of eschatological joy."⁶⁶

Behind this tradition lies ". . . the table-fellowship which once had united Jesus and his 'disciples.'"⁶⁷

There must have been a development from the fellowship meals Jesus had with his disciples, to the joyous meal celebrations after his death, to the sacramental worship the liturgical formula of which we see in Paul and the gospels.

The experience of the risen Christ, especially during meals, is the link connecting the fellowship meals which Jesus had with his disciples and the Lord's Supper of the church. This is especially clear in the Emmaus story:

When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. . . . Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.⁶⁸

Acts 10:40-41 is also important in this regard:

But God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

⁶⁶Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, p. 40.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 58.

⁶⁸Luke 24:30, 31, 35.

In addition to these two passages, Bultmann, pointing out the close relationship between meals and the appearances of the risen Lord, calls our attention to the following texts; Luke 24:41-43; Acts 1:4; John 21:12f.; Mark 16:14.⁶⁹ It is interesting in this regard that in the Gospel According to Hebrews there is a story of the risen Jesus appearing to James so that he can eat.⁷⁰ Jesus ". . . took bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to James the Just and said to him: My brother, eat your bread, for the Son of Man is risen from among them that sleep."⁷¹

It is not only that the experience of the risen Christ led to the fellowship meals of the disciples; rather, in and through the fellowship meals, the risen Christ was experienced. Oscar Cullmann, who has emphasized the part which the experience of the risen Christ played in the beginnings of the Lord's Supper, deserves to be quoted at this point.

Christ's present lordship must be experienced not only as individual revelation, but as Christological revelation of his present form of existence, and this

⁶⁹Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, p. 291.

⁷⁰Shirley Jackson Case, Jesus, A New Biography (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1927), p. 49.

⁷¹Ibid.

happened in the first gatherings for worship.

In the course of these worship services, in which bread was broken "with glad and generous hearts" (Acts 2:46), the presence of the risen Christ was experienced ever anew as a reality. The goal of these services was precisely the realization of fellowship with the same risen Christ who had appeared to his assembled disciples at a meal on Easter Sunday. . . . The "appearance meals", if we may call them that, helped the early Church to experience always afresh the presence of the Lord. . . .⁷²

The study of both the texts regarding the last supper and the texts concerning the "breaking of bread" and the resurrection appearances during meals indicates that Jesus' table-fellowship with his disciples lies behind the Lord's Supper of the church. Therefore, it is appropriate to investigate some of the New Testament passages dealing with Jesus' table-fellowship and their implications for our study.

III. JESUS' TABLE-FELLOWSHIP

That Jesus had table-fellowship with many people and of all sorts of people is strongly embedded in the tradition. That this is old tradition is shown by Luke 13:26. In this passage, the intent of which is to point out how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God, is this verse: "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.'" Here

⁷²Oscar Cullmann, The Christology of the New Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 208.

Luke has taken over the tradition of Jesus eating and drinking with the crowds, and used it in a story which is entirely unrelated to table-fellowship. In addition to this text Jeremias mentions others and notes that Jesus was often invited to meals, usually with other guests, that he sometimes entertained his own guests, and that he often ate in the open with his disciples and followers.⁷³ Especially important is the tradition that Jesus was a glutton and a drunkard (Matt. 11:19 and Par.) and ate with tax collectors and sinners (Mark 2:15-17; Matt. 11:19 and Par.; Luke 15:2). Bultmann believes the tradition is quite old and says with respect to Mark 2:15-17:

The meal seems to be a special occasion, since Jesus' use of *καλεῖν* would be understood as reflecting its use in an invitation to table fellowship, and since table fellowship in general is used symbolically for fellowship as such.⁷⁴

The accounts of the miraculous feeding of the multitudes are also important for our study. As G. H. Boobyer points out,⁷⁵ it is not necessary to view these passages as "eucharistic" in order to see their significance. The emphasis in Mark's accounts of the miraculous

⁷³Jeremias, op. cit., p. 47.

⁷⁴Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, p. 18.

⁷⁵G.H. Boobyer, "The Eucharistic Interpretation of the Miracles of the Loaves in St. Mark's Gospel," The Journal of Theological Studies, III(1952), 161-171.

feedings is on the quantity of broken pieces left over.⁷⁶

This aspect of the two feedings is brought forward as what is to be "understood" (8:14-21). The miracle of the multiplied food points to the miracle of the Church, that the eschatological reality is sufficiently inexhaustible to make possible a society open to all humanity.⁷⁷

Both Mark and John ". . . regarded the miracles of the loaves as witnessing to Jesus as the giver of the bread of life, and presenting him as one who has enough of this spiritual food for all nations."⁷⁸ It is, in fact, the policy of inclusiveness which is the most apparent characteristic of the meals Jesus ate with people. Table-fellowship is symbolical for fellowship as such⁷⁹ and Jesus extended it to all, including the sick, tax collectors and "sinners".

IV. SUMMARY

Let us summarize our study of the main New Testament texts concerning the Lord's Supper. The accounts of the words of institution show that we are dealing with liturgical formula of the worshipping church. The Lord's

⁷⁶James M. Robinson, The Problem of History in Mark (Naperville, Allenson, 1957), pp. 84-85.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 85.

⁷⁸Boobyer, op. cit., p. 171.

⁷⁹Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, p. 18.

Supper is here a sacramental meal. The meaning of the sacrament no doubt varied somewhat from congregation to congregation, but it is clear that the persons ". . . by partaking of bread and wine take into themselves the body and blood of Jesus" ⁸⁰ There is a communion among the participants and a ". . . communion of the partakers with the Kyrios." ⁸¹ It is both a participation in the atoning death of Jesus and in the present power of that same Jesus who is now the Lord by virtue of his resurrection. ⁸²

The tradition which the synoptic writers and Paul have taken over traces the origin of the sacrament back to what Jesus said and did at the last supper. However, it is pure conjecture for us to try to describe what the last supper was and exactly what happened. ⁸³ What we can say is that the accounts show evidence of the fellowship meals Jesus had with his disciples, "sinners", "collaborators" and others.

The "breaking of bread" passages in Acts indicate that the early church gathered together for meals which were eaten in "gladness". Whether the tradition of a

⁸⁰Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 147.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³A.E.J. Rawlinson, St. Mark (London: Methuen, 1925), p. 204.

sacramental meal is reflected here seems to me to be uncertain. The central meaning of these meals was apparently ". . . the eschatological expectation of the Parousia, the return of the Lord: the risen Jesus, now enthroned in heaven, would soon return to judge the world and save his church."⁸⁴ A connecting link between these meals and the table-fellowship of Jesus which is reflected in them is the resurrection appearances at meals. The fact that the risen Jesus made himself known to them in the breaking of bread (Luke 24:31), indicates not only how they could break bread in gladness but how the experience of the risen Jesus came about---namely, through table-fellowship, which as we have said represents fellowship as such.

Finally, we have seen that the gospels reflect the tradition that table-fellowship was a central aspect of Jesus' ministry. In eating with "publicans" and "sinners", Jesus is attacking ". . . legalistic ritualism which strives for an external correctness which can go hand in hand with an impure will."⁸⁵ Jeremias says that Jesus' acceptance of outcasts into table-fellowship means an offer of salvation to guilty "sinners" and the assurance

⁸⁴Kuhn, op. cit., p. 87.

⁸⁵Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 17-18.

of forgiveness.⁸⁶ It is the policy of inclusiveness which is most characteristic of the meals Jesus ate with people.

We have attempted to learn of the origin and early practice of the Lord's Supper from a study of the important New Testament texts. We conclude that there must have been a development from Jesus' table-fellowship to the resurrection appearances, especially at meals, to the joyous common meals of the early church to the sacrament reflected in the accounts of the last supper in the synoptics and in Paul. There was no doubt variety among different groups in the church, the influences of certain traditions being stronger in one area, the speed of the development slower in another, etc. However, the main line of development is clear. First were the meals eaten with Jesus of Nazareth. No one was excluded and the emphasis was on fellowship. After the crucifixion the risen Christ was experienced during meals. In fact the Lord was felt to be present during the fellowship meals of the early church, and his coming in all his glory and power to set up the kingdom of God was also anticipated during these meals. Gradually the importance began to shift from the fellowship---that is, from the act of

⁸⁶Jeremias, op. cit., p. 204.

eating and drinking---to the substances consumed.⁸⁷ Thus in the sacrament of the worshipping community the believers no longer eat with the risen Christ, but eat his body and drink his blood. It is, however, still a corporate act and there is still fellowship with each other; but there is a shift from inclusiveness to exclusiveness and the means of communing with the Lord, who was both crucified and raised, is to partake of his body and blood.

⁸⁷Richardson, op. cit., p. 324.

CHAPTER II

THE LORD'S SUPPER IN JOHN WESLEY AND IN AMERICAN METHODISM

There is obviously a huge chronological gap between the Lord's Supper in the New Testament and the practice of John Wesley and an even greater interval, at least of time, between the early church's sacrament and that of American Methodism. The early church's sacramental meal, which had its roots in the agape, the resurrection appearances of Jesus and in Jesus' normal table-fellowship, was soon separated from the normal meal and became a full-blown liturgical service. It was called the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, the Mass, etc., and its exact form and meaning varied from area to area and church to church. Generally speaking, the service had two parts:

The first centres in the reading and preaching of the Word of God. It was sometimes called simply the 'gathering' (synaxis) and sometimes the service of the catechumens, that is those who were being trained for baptism and membership of the Church. The second is the Sacrament proper, in which the Word is made visible, as St. Augustine said. . . . It was sometimes called the service of the faithful, that is of the baptized members, for only they were allowed to remain for it.¹

However, the tracing of the development of the Lord's

¹A. Raymond George, "The Structure of the Service," The London Quarterly and Holborn Review, CLXXXIV (April 1959), 108.

Supper in the entire history of the Church is a monumental task and certainly beyond the scope of this paper, the purpose of which is to evaluate the present eucharistic practice of the Methodist Church in light of both the New Testament origins and Wesley's practice.

I. THE PRACTICE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER BY JOHN WESLEY

Just as we first examined the New Testament texts and practice which was reflected and then sought the possible meanings, let us discuss first Wesley's practice of the Lord's Supper and then look at his doctrine. The most important fact to recognize in discussing both his practice and theology, which are in reality inseparable, is that Wesley did not conceive of his movement as beginning a church set apart from the Church of England, but ". . . as an evangelical order within a catholic Church."² As Albert Outler says,

It was his plain intention that his followers should depend on the Church, not only for the sacraments themselves but also for their doctrinal interpretation. He deliberately designed the Methodist preaching services so that they would not be taken as substitutes for Holy Communion in the parish church, and he expressly forbade their being scheduled in direct competition with stated church hours.³

²Albert C. Outler (ed.), John Wesley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 332.

³Ibid.

The Lord's Supper was generally speaking largely neglected in England during the eighteenth century.⁴

John C. Bowmer gives several possible causes, both theological and political, which are not meant to be exhaustive:

(1) Frequent celebration had been discouraged during the Protectorate, and it was difficult to revive it among a people accustomed to infrequent celebrations. . . .

(2) Those who tried to revive frequent communion were suspected of "popish" intentions . . .

(3) Many churches were without incumbents. . . .

(4) In less than two hundred years the Church of England had suffered at least four purges in which she had been deprived of her best servants, . . .

(5) In some places, indolent clergy and brutal populace had no taste for the Eucharistic worship of the Christian Church.

(6) In an age of reason, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and all that it implied, was disparaged. . . .

(7) By the Test Act of 1673, the Holy Communion had been made a test of political allegiance of which membership in the National Church was a sign. . . .

(8) . . . The great stress on thorough preparation.⁵

In spite of the low esteem in which the Lord's Supper was generally held, Wesley believed it to be of the utmost importance. During his life he communicated on the average of every five days.⁶ He took communion whenever the opportunity arose, and his plea was not merely for frequent communion but for "constant" communion. In a

⁴John C. Bowmer, The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism (London: Dacre Press, 1951), p. 15.

⁵Ibid., pp. 3-5.

⁶Ibid., p. 17.

sermon on the subject of constant communion he said,

Let everyone, therefore, who has either any desire to please God, or any love of his own soul, obey God, and consult the good of his own soul, by communicating every time he can---like the first Christians, with whom the Christian sacrifice was a constant part of the Lord's-day service.⁷

No doubt his parents inculcated in Wesley a deep attachment for the sacrament⁸ and we can see the influences of Anglicanism and Moravianism.⁹ Whatever other influences there may have been, it is clear that he considered the Lord's Supper extremely important.

Although Wesley believed that ordination was not required to preach, he did think it necessary in order to administer the sacraments.¹⁰ At first, as was mentioned earlier, Methodists were encouraged to take communion in the parish church, but increasingly the Wesleys were not allowed to preach from Anglican pulpits and their followers were refused access to the Lord's Table.¹¹ In attempting to deal with the problem the Wesleys held many celebrations with the sick. "Canon law allowed communicants to join with the sick, and this explains the fact that a large number of Methodists joined in such services."¹²

⁷John Wesley, "On the Duty of Constant Communion," in Outler, op. cit., p. 336.

⁸Bowmer, op. cit., p. 18. ⁹Ibid., pp. 60-61.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 149. ¹¹Ibid., p. 63. ¹²Ibid., p. 64.

When this practice proved insufficient, ordained clergy were allowed to administer to the London Society in consecrated buildings.¹³ Even this could not meet the demand and the Sacrament was then administered in unconsecrated Methodist chapels.¹⁴

The final stage was reached about 1789 when John Wesley ordained some of his preachers to administer the Lord's Supper in England. . . . Methodist societies could now have the Sacrament in their own chapels administered by their own preachers.¹⁵

Wesley used the framework of the communion service in the Book of Common Prayer, making some changes and adding hymn singing and extemporary prayer.¹⁶ Bowmer has tabulated and classified the changes which Wesley made in the 1662 revision of the Anglican service,¹⁷ and he points out that

(a) There are alterations which were necessitated by the fact that the book was to be used at Methodist services and not in the Parish Church. . . .

(b) Some alterations were made in the interests of brevity or of style. . . .

(c) Some ceremonial rubrics were omitted

(d) Some alterations indicate the particular emphasis and the doctrinal position of Methodism. . . .

(e) The omission of the Nicene Creed

(f) There are several additions which are significant.¹⁸

Since the last three categories are the most important,

¹³Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 101-2.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 211-13.

they deserve some further comment. Included in category (d) are the substitution of the term "elder" for "priest" and the alteration of the form of absolution.¹⁹

Instead of the priest referring to God in the third person and himself absolving the people whom he addresses in the second person, Wesley turns what is a pronouncement into a petition and the Elder, being one with the people and using the first person plural, prays with them to God (second person singular) for pardon.²⁰

Although the reason for the omission of the Nicene Creed (category e) is unknown, it was probably done in order to shorten the service.²¹ Some of the additions which are significant (category f) are the instruction to stand for the Comfortable Words, the rubric that ministers and people (not only the priest) are to kneel for the Prayer of Humble Access, and the permission to use extemporary prayer after the service.²²

Despite the changes and additions which Wesley made, it is amazing how close he remained to the Anglican service. In addition to his fidelity to the Prayer Book and the addition of extemporary prayer, the addition of hymn singing is another important characteristic of the Lord's Supper as practiced by Wesley. Although eucharistic hymns had been sung in the church at various times and

¹⁹Ibid., p. 212.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., p. 213.

places before the Wesleys,²³ it was apparently a novelty in the eighteenth century.²⁴ Wesley believed that the service should be conducted with great reverence,²⁵ another characteristic of his practice, and it grieved him, as he wrote in his Journal, to see communicants ". . . behaving in a manner that shocked common sense as well as religion."²⁶ On the other hand, he appreciated orderly behavior. After attending a service at which the sacrament was administered he wrote, "I never saw so much decency at any chapel in Oxford, no, not even in Lincoln College. Scarce any person stirred or coughed or spit from the beginning to the end of the service."²⁷ Another feature of the Lord's Supper in early Methodism was the giving of money for the poor.²⁸ Wesley wrote in one of his letters,

²³A.S. Gregory, "Communion Hymns," The London Quarterly and Holborn Review, CLXXXIV (April 1959), 116.

²⁴J. Ernest Rattenbury, The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley (London: Epworth Press, 1948), p. 152.

²⁵Bowmer, op. cit., p. 82.

²⁶John Wesley, The Journal of the Reverend John Wesley (London: Epworth Press, 1913), IV, 259.

²⁷Ibid., p. 156.

²⁸Bowmer, op. cit., p. 98.

We took in as many widows as we had room for, and provided them with things needful for the body; toward the expense of which I set aside first the weekly contributions of the bands, and then all that was collected at the Lord's Supper.²⁹

Who could partake of the Lord's Supper according to Wesley? In his sermon on constant communion he says all that is necessary is ". . . first, a full purpose of heart to keep all the commandments of God; and, secondly, a sincere desire to receive all his promises."³⁰ He believed that every earnest seeker has a degree of faith and ought to be admitted.³¹ However, in addition to this moral and spiritual requirement, the large crowds and those who were antagonistic to the Methodists necessitated a practical requirement if the sanctity of the ordinance was to be preserved.³² Therefore the communicant had to present a class ticket or communion note obtained from Wesley or one of his assistants in order to partake of the Sacrament.³³

The communion table was set against the pulpit and the minister conducted the service from the front or the

²⁹John Wesley, The Letters of the Reverend John Wesley (London: Epworth Press, 1931), II, 308.

³⁰Wesley, "On the Duty . . .", p. 337.

³¹Bowmer, op. cit., p. 113.

³²Ibid., p. 115.

³³Ibid., p. 56.

side.³⁴ In other words, the Wesleys followed the Church of England custom of railing off the table and placing it along the East wall, "altar-wise," and even called it an "altar."³⁵ Generally speaking, early Methodists received the elements ". . . by proceeding to the rails at the altar and there kneeling while the minister delivered the elements into their hands."³⁶ A common cup was of course used as in the Church of England.

Except where extreme reformed or puritanical principles prevailed, an endeavour seems to have been made to design the chalice so that its shape would be mid-way between the elaborate specimen used by the Roman priest and the ugly, straightsided type, often beaker-shaped, of the Puritans.³⁷

It is probable that the custom of approaching and leaving the table in groups also goes back to Wesley.³⁸

As we turn to a discussion of what the Lord's Supper meant to John Wesley, we must keep in mind the practice which we have examined, his faithfulness to the Church of England, and the fact that he was very much a part of the Evangelical Revival. His intense concern for individual persons and their concrete problems and needs is no doubt the main reason why Wesley is a "practical theologian"---

³⁴John C. Bowmer, "The History of Holy Communion in Methodism," The London Quarterly and Holborn Review, CLXXXIV (April 1959), 98.

³⁵Bowmer, The Sacrament. . . , pp. 93-94.

³⁶Ibid., p. 93. ³⁷Ibid., p. 222. ³⁸Ibid., p. 95

that is, his theology becomes apparent from his sermons, treatises, hymns and other "practical" works. Although Wesley discussed the Lord's Supper in many different places, his most thorough treatment of the subject is in the extremely practical Hymns on the Lord's Supper to which was prefaced an extract from Dr. Brevint's Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice.³⁹ J. Ernest Rattenbury in his book The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley points out that although Charles Wesley undoubtedly wrote most if not all of the hymns, John ". . . deliberately took the responsibility of joint authorization of their doctrine."⁴⁰ The extract from Dr. Brevint was certainly John's.⁴¹

The first heading in the Hymns on the Lord's Supper is "As it is a Memorial of the Sufferings and Death of Christ."⁴² Wesley believed that the Lord's Supper causes us to remember the atoning death of Christ. He wrote,

. . . we learn that the design of this sacrament is the continual remembrance of the death of Christ, by eating bread and drinking wine, which are the outward signs of the inward grace---the body and blood of Christ.⁴³

It is a memorial but not only that, and therefore Wesley

³⁹Rattenbury, op. cit., pp. 176-249.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 12. ⁴¹Ibid. ⁴²Ibid., p. 196.

⁴³Wesley, "On the Duty. . .," p. 337.

is not a memorialist in the strict sense of the term.

Referring to both Brevint and Wesley, Rattenbury says,

The Sacrament could never mean to them a bare memorial of the dead Christ, for the simple reason that He was living---still bearing upon His hands and feet glorious scars. but ascended to heaven, where He pleaded His cause with His Father for them.⁴⁴

This is illustrated in Hymn 21 where the memory of Jesus' death is clearly portrayed:

O, my God, He dies for me,
I feel the mortal smart!
See Him hanging on the tree---
A sight that breaks my heart!
O that all to Thee might turn!
Sinners, ye may love Him too;
Look on Him ye pierced, and mourn
For One who bled for you.⁴⁵

But pure memorialism is left behind as the hymn continues:

Weep o'er your Desire and Hope
With tears of humblest love;
Sing, for Jesus is gone up,
And reigns enthroned above!⁴⁶

Probably the most important significance of the Lord's Supper to Wesley was that it was a means of grace. Perhaps indicative of this is the fact that the second section of the Hymns, entitled "As it is a Sign and a Means of Grace," has over twice as many hymns as any other section. Whereas "sign" formed one section in Brevint and "means of grace" another, Wesley combined them to show

⁴⁴Rattenbury, op. cit., p. 21.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 201.

⁴⁶Ibid.

that the bread and wine are not arbitrary signs but instruments by which God imparts grace.⁴⁷ In one of his sermons Wesley explained,

By "means of grace," I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby He might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.⁴⁸

There are other ways to encounter God, such as attending church, fasting, praying, reading the Scriptures, etc.,⁴⁹ but the Lord's Supper is the chief means of grace.⁵⁰ As Albert Outler says,

. . . The Wesleys conceived of sacramental grace as God's love in action in the lives of faithful men at worship. The Lord's Supper is the paradigm of all "the means of grace"---the chief actual means of actual grace and, as such, literally indispensable in the Christian life.⁵¹

Lycurgus Starkey says that according to Wesley grace is imparted by the presence of the Holy Spirit.⁵² "The Holy Spirit grants faith that enables man to see in

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 32.

⁴⁸John Wesley, The Sermons of John Wesley, (London: Epworth Press, 1961), p. 35.

⁴⁹Egil Grisliis, "The Wesleyan Doctrine of the Lord's Supper," The Duke Divinity School Bulletin, XXVIII (May 1963), 100.

⁵⁰Lycurgus M. Starkey, Jr., The Work of the Holy Spirit (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 95.

⁵¹Outler, op. cit., p. 333.

⁵²Starkey, op. cit., p. 96.

the elements the re-presentation of the passion of Christ."⁵³ Secondly, assurance is given the partaker by the Spirit. As Starkey says, "The inner presence of the Holy Spirit is recognized as man's divine guarantee or certification that he is presently accepted by God."⁵⁴ The way this happens is mysterious. God's ways are not man's ways and Wesley believed that the exact process was not for man to know.⁵⁵ The first verse of Hymn 59 is quite explicit:

God incomprehensible
 Shall man presume to know;
 Fully search Him out, or tell
 His wondrous ways below?
 Him in all His ways we find;
How the means transmit the power---
 Here He leaves our thought behind,
 And faith inquires no more.⁵⁶

For Wesley the important thing was not how God transmits the power but that he does; and this we know because we experience it.⁵⁷ The following stanza shows the belief in the real presence:

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Rattenbury, op. cit., p. 46.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 213.

⁵⁷Starkey, op. cit., p. 102.

We need not now go up to heaven,
 To bring the long-sought Savior
 down;
 Thou art to all already given,
 Thou dost even now Thy banquet
 crown:
 To every faithful soul appear,
 And show Thy real presence here!⁵⁸

The real presence is not physical but personal---the Lord himself is there.⁵⁹

Wesley's belief that the Lord's Supper was not just a confirming ordinance but a converting ordinance is one reason for his practice of constant communion. Because he believed the benefits of communion were so great (" . . . the forgiveness of our past sins, the present strengthening and refreshing of our souls."⁶⁰), he felt we should partake as often as possible. It also lies behind his liberal policy as to who could take communion. Whereas the Moravians said that only believers could partake,⁶¹ Wesley wrote,

. . . No fitness is required at the time of communicating, but a sense of our state, of our utter sinfulness and helplessness; every one who knows he is

⁵⁸Rattenbury, op. cit., p. 232.

⁵⁹Starkey, op. cit., pp. 101-2.

⁶⁰John Wesley, "Sermon on Constant Communion," in Outler, op. cit., p. 335.

⁶¹Bowmer, The Sacrament . . ., p. 108.

fit for hell being just fit to come to Christ
in this as well as all other ways of his appoint-
ment.⁶²

Again, he wrote, "I invite to the Table of the Lord every person whom I invite to the Lord, and upon the same condition: "Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins."⁶³ Because he viewed the Lord's Supper as a converting ordinance, Wesley could call sinners to partake.⁶⁴

The third section of the Hymns on the Lord's Supper, entitled "The Sacrament a Pledge of Heaven," portrays the Supper as both a foretaste and a pledge of things to come.⁶⁵ Triumphant joy is expressed because of the present experience of God's redeeming love, as told in Hymn 93:

By faith and hope already there,
Even now the marriage-feast we share,
Even now we by the Lamb are fed;
Our Lord's celestial joy we prove,
Led by the Spirit of His love,
To springs of living comfort led:⁶⁶

But at the same time the eschatological hope is present. Wesley believed that the Supper was a pledge that the partakers would feast with their Lord in heaven:

⁶²Wesley, The Journal, II, 362.

⁶³James T. Cleland, Wherefore Art Thou Come? (New York: Abingdon Press, 1961), p. 54.

⁶⁴Bowmer, The Sacrament . . ., p. 108.

⁶⁵Rattenbury, op. cit., p. 224. ⁶⁶Ibid., p. 225.

The fruit of the wine (The joy it im-
plies)
Again we shall join To drink in the
skies,
Exult in His favour, Our triumph
renew;
And I, saith the Saviour, Will drink it
with you.⁶⁷

The zeal with which the early Methodists sung these eucharistic hymns is itself an indication of this triumphant joy and hope.

"The Holy Eucharist as it implies a Sacrifice" is the fourth heading for the hymns.⁶⁸ John Wesley had no reticence in speaking of the Lord's Supper as a sacrifice. In a letter he defended his belief in "an outward sacrifice"⁶⁹ and sacrificial terminology is found throughout the hymns.

Father, God, who seest in me
Only sin and misery,
See Thine own Anointed One,
Look on Thy beloved Son.
Turn from me Thy glorious eyes
To that bloody Sacrifice,⁷⁰

At the Lord's Supper we remember Jesus' atoning death--- we do not sacrifice him again. How could we, for he has risen, ascended and is at the right hand of God.⁷¹ His was a once-for-all and all-sufficient sacrifice.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 231.

⁶⁹Wesley, The Letters, II, 55.

⁷⁰Rattenbury, op. cit., p. 232.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 105.

All hail, Thou mighty to atone!
 To expiate sin is Thine alone,
 Thou hast alone the wine-press trod,
 Thou only hast for sinners died,
 By one oblation satisfied
 Th' inexorably righteous God.

Should the whole church in flames
 arise,
 Offer'd as one burnt sacrifice,
 The sinner's smallest debt to pay,
 They could not, Lord, Thine honour
 share,
 With Thee the Father's justice bear,
 Or bear one single sin away.⁷²

However, there is a sense in which the participants sacrifice at the Lord's Supper, as the fifth heading implies: "Concerning the sacrifice of our persons."⁷³ The partakers offer up themselves and their possessions to God.⁷⁴ The sacrifice which the individuals constituting the church make is joined with the all-sufficient sacrifice which Christ made, as the following verses show:

Thy sacrifice with heavenly powers
 Replete, all holy, all Divine;
 Human and weak, and sinful ours:
 How can the two oblations join?

. . .

Our mean imperfect sacrifice
 On Thine is as a burden thrown;
 Both in a common flame arise,
 And both in God's account are one.⁷⁵

⁷²Ibid., p. 236.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Bowmer, The Sacrament . . ., p. 183.

⁷⁵Rattenbury, op. cit., p. 242.

Thus, as Grislis says in discussing Wesley's theology, "Our sacrifice is not required in order to enrich the atonement, but is a way by which we are enabled to partake in the benefits of the atonement."⁷⁶

When we realize the importance of sacrifice in the Lord's Supper of Wesley, it becomes clearer why alms giving was an integral part of the service. The following verse indicates the strong desire to devote all one's life and possessions to the service of God:

Take my soul and body's powers,
Take my memory, mind, and will,
All my goods, and all my hours,
All I know, and all I feel,
All I think, and speak, and do;
Take my heart---but make it new.⁷⁷

The sacrificial aspect of the Supper is also reflected in the position of the table and the manner of taking communion. "The Puritan method was for an unrailed table to stand 'in the midst of the chancel' and for communicants to receive the elements sitting or kneeling in their pews."⁷⁸ Thus it was an ordinary table and the Lord's Supper was merely a fellowship meal.⁷⁹ Wesley stood in the Anglican and Catholic tradition in which ". . . the

⁷⁶Grislis, op. cit., p. 108.

⁷⁷Rattenbury, op. cit., p. 244.

⁷⁸Bowmer, The Sacrament . . ., p. 93.

⁷⁹Ibid.

Lord's Table was symbolically an altar and the Lord's Supper a Eucharistic Sacrifice."⁸⁰

For Wesley the Lord's Supper was an event in which the participants communed with each other, with all the believers of all time, and with their Lord. Bowmer calls this Wesley's doctrine of the Communion of Saints.⁸¹ The Lord's Supper was for him a corporate act---the members of the whole community penitently remembered Christ's death, accepted the grace which even now God was imparting, and joyfully responded by sacrificing their lives and possessions. The hymns are full of the idea that the Supper is a corporate act on the part of the whole body of Christ. For example,

How happy are Thy servants, Lord,
Who thus remember Thee!
What tongue can tell our sweet accord,
Our perfect harmony?

Who Thy mysterious supper share,
Here at Thy table fed,
Many, and yet but one we are,
One undivided bread.

One with the living Bread Divine
Which now by faith we eat,
Our hearts, and minds, and spirits join,
And all in Jesus meet.⁸²

In fact, the great importance given to hymn singing by the Wesleys and the early Methodists is itself a

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 185.

⁸²Rattenbury, op. cit., p. 248.

reflection of their belief that the Lord's Supper is a corporate act.⁸³ As Rattenbury says with regard to the significance of hymn singing,

Charles Wesley not only gave opportunity for expression to hearts full of thanksgiving---the true Eucharist---but also made the people realize that the service was not the performance of a separate priest on their behalf, but of the whole priestly community, the Body of Christ.⁸⁴

It is possible that the custom of approaching and leaving the communion table in groups is also symbolic of the corporateness of the act. Because it is a communion of saints they come and go not as isolated units but as a body.⁸⁵

In conclusion, the Lord's Supper was for John Wesley a most significant part of his Christian life and he observed it as often as he could. The service of worship which Wesley used was basically that of the Church of England to which he added hymn singing and extemporaneous prayer. The sacrament was a corporate act in which the individuals composing the group sorrowfully remembered their own sins and Christ's atoning death, received God's forgiveness and renewing power and committed their lives and possessions to Him. That God's redeeming grace was

⁸³Gregory, op. cit., p. 115.

⁸⁴Rattenbury, op. cit., p. 152.

⁸⁵Bowmer, The Sacrament . . ., p. 95.

experienced in the Lord's Supper and that joy and thanksgiving resulted is reflected in the eucharistic hymns.

Before leaving John Wesley and tracing the development of the Lord's Supper in American Methodism, let us briefly examine a related phenomenon in Wesley's practice---the love-feast. When Wesley was in Georgia in 1737 the Moravians celebrated the love-feast and he took up the practice realizing its pastoral possibilities as well as the fact that it was a revival of primitive Christianity.⁸⁶ He wrote in 1748 in his Plain Account of the People called Methodists,

In order to increase in them a grateful sense of all His mercies, I desired that, one evening in a quarter, all the men in band, on a second all the women, would meet, and on a third both men and women together; that we might together 'eat bread', as the ancient Christians did, 'with gladness and singleness of heart'. At these love-feasts (so we termed them, retaining the name as well as the thing which was in use from the beginning) our food is only a little plain cake and water. But we seldom return from them without being fed, not only with the 'meat which perisheth', but with 'that which endureth to everlasting life'.⁸⁷

While the members ate bread and drank water together, they ". . . spoke of their spiritual life, their

⁸⁶Frank Baker, Methodism and the Love-Feast (New York: Macmillan, 1957), pp. 9-10.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 14.

trials and triumphs, their hopes and fears".⁸⁸ In fact, ". . . the focal point was testimony, the spiritual 'sharing' to which the taking of food and drink together was the symbolic prelude."⁸⁹ Wesley was determined that these love-feasts would be held decently and in order,⁹⁰ and an order of service was followed. Frank Baker says the normal order was something like the following:

Hymn
Prayer
Grace (sung)
Bread distributed by stewards
Collection for the poor
Circulation of loving-cup
Address by the presiding minister
Testimonies and verses of hymns
Spontaneous prayers and verses of hymns
Closing exhortation by the minister
Hymn
Benediction⁹¹

In the mind of Wesley the Lord's Supper and the love-feast were related and early Methodists often participated in both on the same day.⁹² Especially when they found themselves barred from communion, the love-feast was sometimes viewed as a substitute.⁹³ However, Wesley always viewed the love-feast, which had no suggestion of

⁸⁸Umphrey Lee, John Wesley and Modern Religion (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1936), p. 232.

⁸⁹Baker, op. cit., p. 25.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 32 ff.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 15.

⁹²Ibid., pp. 65-6.

⁹³Ibid., p. 66.

consecrated elements or of a sacrificial offering,⁹⁴ as subordinate to the Lord's Supper.⁹⁵

II. THE DEVELOPMENT IN AMERICAN METHODISM FROM WESLEY TO THE PRESENT

Until 1784 the Methodists in America were deprived of the Sacraments because there were not ordained clergy to administer them.⁹⁶ In that year Wesley, who felt responsible for their welfare, ordained several preachers to go to America.⁹⁷ With these men he apparently sent his revision of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer entitled The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America with other Occasional Services,⁹⁸ which included the service for the Lord's Supper which we discussed in connection with Wesley's own practice. On September 10, 1784, in a letter to "Our Brethren in America," he wrote,

I have prepared a Liturgy little differing from that of the Church of England (I think, the best constituted National Church in the World), which I advise all the travelling preachers to use on the Lord's Day in all the congregations. . . . I also advise the elders to administer the Supper of the Lord on every Lord's Day.⁹⁹

⁹⁴Bowmer, The Sacrament. . . , p. 199.

⁹⁵Baker, op. cit., p. 66.

⁹⁶Bowmer, The Sacrament. . . , p. 148.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 206.

⁹⁹Wesley, The Letters, Sept. 10, 1784.

Although Wesley's intended practice for the Americans is clear, what they did was entirely different.¹⁰⁰

As George Hedley says,

Glad enough to accept their independence and to assert their status (Coke and Asbury signed themselves as 'The Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church' in an address to George Washington in 1789), and giving lip service for formally adopting the 'Sunday Service' at the Christmas Conference, the Methodists in America proceeded to carry out the worship procedures not of the Church but of the former societies.¹⁰¹

Although American Methodism kept Wesley's enthusiasm and devotion, it ignored the high value which he placed on the historic order and went to the other extreme of independent improvisation.¹⁰²

Before looking at the change in the order of the communion service, which is the most important evidence of Methodism's disregard of its own tradition, we may mention two other changes. Although hymn singing is still an important part of the Lord's Supper in Methodism, most of the Wesleys' hymns have fallen into disuse. As late as the first part of the twentieth century it was not uncommon for the Hymnals to be replaced by slim books of gospel songs, quite in keeping with the mood of frontier

¹⁰⁰George Hedley, "Methodist Worship," in his Some Factors in Worship (Los Angeles: Southern California-Arizona Conference, The Methodist Church, 1959), p. 8.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 9.

revivalism.¹⁰³ Of course the mere use of hymnals was no guarantee that the eucharistic hymns would be used. Whereas the Hymns on the Lord's Supper contained 166 eucharistic hymns, the 1964 Methodist Hymnal has 20 hymns under the section "The Lord's Supper," 3 by Charles Wesley. Another change in practice occurred around the turn of the century when Methodism took over the use of individual glasses instead of the common cup.¹⁰⁴

However, it is the change of the order of worship which is the main indication of the change which took place. Although the appearance of Bishop Wilbur Patterson Thirkield's Service and Prayers for Church and Home, published in 1918, helped to bring the Wesley service back into Methodist consciousness,¹⁰⁵ there has still been in this century a basic disregard for the historic order. This can be observed by a comparison of the order of the Lord's Supper which Wesley sent to this country with the orders appearing in The Methodist Hymnal of 1939 and The Book of Worship for Church and Home published in 1964:

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Bowmer, The History . . ., p. 102.

¹⁰⁵Hedley, op. cit., p. 10.

<u>Wesley</u>	<u>1939</u>	<u>1964</u>
	Prelude	Prelude
	Hymn	Hymn
	Call to Worship	Call to Worship
	<u>Gloria Patri</u>	
Lord's Prayer	Collect for Purity	Collect for Purity
Collect for Purity	Lord's Prayer	Lord's Prayer
Ten Commandments	Ten Commandments, Lord's Sum. of Law or Beat.	<u>Gloria in Excelsis</u>
Collect	Responsive Reading	Invitation
Collect	Epistle	General Confession
Epistle	Gospel	Prayer for Pardon
Gospel	Apostles Creed or other Affirmation of Faith	Comfortable Words
Sermon	Sermon	Pastoral Prayer or Prayer for Church
	Hymn	Scripture
Offertory	Offering	Hymn
	Choral Response	Apostles Creed or other Affirmation of Faith
Prayer for Church	Ascription of Praise	Sermon
Exhortation	Invitation	Hymn
Confession	General Confession	Offering
Prayer for Pardon	Prayer for Pardon	Words of Dedication
Comfortable Words	Comfortable Words	

<u>Wesley</u>	<u>1939</u>	<u>1964</u>
<u>Sursum Corda</u>	<u>Sursum Corda</u>	<u>Sursum Corda</u>
Preface	Preface	Preface
Sanctus	Sanctus	Sanctus
Prayer of Humble Access	Prayer of Conse- cration	Prayer of Conse- cration
Administration of Sacrament	Administration of Sacrament	Administration of Sacrament
The Lord's Prayer	Prayer of Oblation	Prayer of Oblation
<u>Gloria in Excelsis</u>	<u>Gloria in Excelsis</u>	Hymn
Benediction	Benediction	Benediction ¹⁰⁶

The order in the 1939 hymnal does not contain the Prayer for the Church, the Exhortation and the repetition of the Lord's Prayer after the administration of the Sacrament. In addition to what Wesley's service contained it has the Call to Worship, the Gloria Patri, the Apostles Creed or some other Affirmation of Faith, an Ascription of Praise, and a Prayer of Oblation. The Decalogue, Summary of the Law, Beatitudes, Isaiah 53:1-10, the Epistle, Gospel and Creed are all optional.¹⁰⁷ The order of the Lord's Prayer and the Collect for Purity is reversed, as

¹⁰⁶The respective orders for the services were extracted from Bowmer, The Sacrament. . ., pp. 207-11; The Methodist Hymnal (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1939), pp. 523-32; and The Book of Worship for Church and Home of the Methodist Church (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1964), pp. 15-22.

¹⁰⁷Hedley, op. cit., p. 11.

is the case with the Prayer of Humble Access and the Prayer of Consecration.

An addition to the order of the 1939 service, diffidence toward the tradition is expressed in the wording of the prayers. For example, in the Prayer of Consecration, "a perpetual memory of his precious death until his coming again" is replaced by "this memorial of his precious death", and in place of "partakers of his most blessed body and blood" we find "partakers of the divine nature through him."¹⁰⁸ In the Prayer of Humble Access, we do not "eat the flesh of thy Son Jesus Christ, and drink his blood", but we instead "partake of these memorials of thy Son Jesus Christ."¹⁰⁹ Its purpose is not that "our sinful souls and bodies may be made clean by his death, and washed through his most precious blood", but that "we may be filled with the fullness of his life, may grow into his likeness."¹¹⁰

The 1964 order is even further removed from that of Wesley. The Decalogue, Epistle and Gospel are replaced by "Scripture." The Gloria in Excelsis is moved from the end to the beginning of the service. The most obvious change in the order is the removal of the Invitation, the General Confession, the Prayer of Pardon, and the Comfortable

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

Words from their traditional place after the Creed, the Sermon, the Offering, and the Prayer for the Church.¹¹¹ They have instead been placed before the Creed and the Sermon.

It is noteworthy that the 1964 order replaces the Prayer for the Church. There is also some attempt in the new order to return certain traditional ideas and words to the prayers which had been dropped or changed. For example, where the Prayer of Consecration in the 1939 hymnal reads "command us to continue this memorial of His precious death", the new order returns to the original statement: "command us to continue a perpetual memory of his precious death until his coming again". Also, where the Prayer of Humble Access used to say "partake of these memorials of Thy Son Jesus Christ", it now reads "partake of this Sacrament of thy Son Jesus Christ".

However, other traditional phrases were not put back. For example, the Prayer of Consecration still reads "partakers of the divine nature through him" instead of "partakers of his most blessed body and blood". The Prayer of Humble Access continues to state "partake of this Sacrament" rather than "eat the flesh of thy Son

¹¹¹Report of The Commission on Worship to the General Conference of The Methodist Church 1964 (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1964), pp. 24-25.

Jesus Christ and . . . drink his blood", and hopes that "we may walk in newness of life, may grow into his likeness, and may evermore dwell in him, and he in us" instead of that "our sinful souls and bodies may be made clean by his death, and washed through his most precious blood". And even more important, the radical change in the 1964 order of worship has utterly destroyed the twofold division of the service (Word and Sacrament), which was not only typical of Wesley's service but goes back to the time of Justin.¹¹²

Why did this departure from Wesley's practice come about? In the first place, no doubt Wesley himself unknowingly sowed the seeds of what J. Ernest Rattenbury calls the decline of sacramentalism in modern Methodism.¹¹³ Since Wesley maintained that unordained men were not permitted to administer the Sacraments, communion was unavailable for many Methodists. They no longer belonged to the Anglican church but there were not enough ordained Methodist preachers to go around.¹¹⁴ Thus Methodists began to emphasize the distinctive devotions such as class meetings, love-feasts, etc., which ". . . did much to meet

¹¹²George, op. cit., p. 108.

¹¹³Rattenbury, op. cit., p. 148.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 149.

the spiritual needs of the people which Holy Communion might normally have satisfied."¹¹⁵ There were no doubt many of the early Methodists who were quite satisfied with this drift away from the observance of the Eucharist, for the Oxford Movement in England and the rebirth of Anglo-Catholicism quickened the fear of anything Popish.¹¹⁶

George Hedley gives the following three reasons for the change in attitude toward the traditional form of the Lord's Supper among American Methodists:¹¹⁷

- 1) Most Methodists in America had Puritan or Separatist background.
- 2) General low level of literacy made historic worship difficult and intellectually misunderstood.
- 3) Anti-British feeling was engendered by Revolution.

To these we can add the effects of frontier life which tended to make men feel more self-sufficient and "practical". Finally, and perhaps most importantly, was the impact of the liberal attitude toward man and his abilities which pervaded the Church during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Such an optimistic view of man helps to explain the hesitancy to speak of Jesus' death as a sacrifice and the preference for memorialism in its pure form. John C. Bowmer says,

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Hedley, op. cit., p. 8.

Apart from the teaching of Dr. W.B. Pope, the main doctrinal emphasis was upon the Lord's Supper as an expression of fellowship and dedication; its sacrificial and eschatological aspects were almost entirely forgotten.¹¹⁸

It also helps to explain the shift, symbolized by the use of individual cups, from the emphasis on the corporateness of the act to a kind of individualism.

It is not our purpose to decry this change in the practice and theology of the Lord's Supper, but to observe it and to seek for the causes. There are no doubt other good reasons for this change and we shall mention some of them in Chapter III when we discuss the psychological meaning of the Sacrament and the nature of symbols and their significance for contemporary man. Whatever the causes, a study of the Lord's Supper in American Methodism from Wesley to the present time reveals much change in both practice and doctrine.

A brief mention of the love-feast in the United States is in order before turning to an analysis of the present practice of the Lord's Supper. The love-feast apparently thrived quite well at first. Even before the arrival of Francis Asbury, Joseph Pulmoor wrote in his journal,

¹¹⁸Bowmer, "The History . . .," p. 102.

Friday, March 23, 1770, in the evening, we had our first American Love-feast in Philadelphia and it was indeed a time of love. The people behave with much propriety and decorum, as if they had been for many years acquainted with the economy of the Methodists. Perhaps this favorable beginning will encourage the people to wish for such a season again and may help to prepare them to eat bread together in the Kingdom of God.¹¹⁹

However, the practice of the love-feast declined during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries¹²⁰ until today most Methodists have never even heard of it. Frank Baker suggests several reasons for this decline:

The greatest single cause of the decline was the fact that the love-feast in its traditional Methodist form was a product and an instrument of revivalism. When, therefore, as almost inevitably happened, the revival atmosphere was suffused with, or even replaced by, what we may call the 'church atmosphere', the love-feast was bound to suffer.

A contributory cause was undoubtedly the relaxing of discipline which resulted in the love-feast's being gradually transformed from an intimate festival of the saved, together with a few seekers, into a public meeting---and even a public spectacle.¹²¹

Another important reason is that the symbolism of the common meal was lost and the love-feast became only a testimony meeting.¹²²

III. THE CURRENT PRACTICE IN AMERICAN METHODISM

There have been very few attempts to discover what the Lord's Supper means to Methodist laymen today.

¹¹⁹Baker, op. cit., p. 49.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 56.

¹²¹Ibid., pp. 56-7.

¹²²Ibid., p. 57.

Michael J. Taylor in his book The Protestant Liturgical Renewal, A Catholic Viewpoint discusses the results of a questionnaire which he sent to ministers of several major Protestant denominations, including The Methodist Church.¹²³ This is of some help to our study for it gives an indication of the practice of the Lord's Supper in our churches in terms of frequency, manner of partaking, etc. It also seeks to discover the theology of the Lord's Supper held by these ministers. Generally speaking, Dr. Taylor found evidence of a growing concern and respect for the Lord's Supper, a desire to understand its theological meaning, and a movement to recover the historical roots of the sacrament in the Church's history and in the New Testament.¹²⁴ However, since this study did not address its questions to laymen nor attempt to discover the significance of the Lord's Supper on the feeling level, further investigation was deemed necessary.

In an attempt to discover the meaning of the Lord's Supper for Methodist laymen today I constructed a questionnaire and sent it to 1188 Methodists living in the San Gabriel Valley of Southern California. It was sent to

¹²³Michael J. Taylor, The Protestant Liturgical Renewal, A Catholic Viewpoint (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1963), pp. 149-183.

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 179.

each of the 233 members of the San Dimas Methodist Church, San Dimas, California, and one to each of the 955 households of the Trinity Methodist Church, Pomona, California. In this way members of both a small and a large church were asked to respond.

The limitations of this attempt are: 1) the questionnaire was sent to a limited geographical area and does not necessarily reflect the feelings of Methodist laymen generally nor even those of Southern California, but of some of the members of these two churches;¹²⁵ 2) no attempt was made to discover who had not responded and to incorporate their feelings and ideas; 3) only 5% (60) of the questionnaires were returned. The percentage of questionnaires was reduced partly because I did not include stamped, self-addressed envelopes with the questionnaires. Due to the small percentage of questionnaires returned the results cannot be considered conclusive in any sense.

However, the responses do indicate how some Methodist laymen feel about the Lord's Supper which they have experienced in their churches. The questions were made open-ended whenever possible to allow more freedom of expression. In the final question the respondents were

¹²⁵It is also true, however, that the population of Southern California is made up of people from all parts of the United States, so that in a certain sense the sample is representative of Methodist laymen generally.

given a chance to make suggestions as to how the service might be made more meaningful. The questionnaire with my initial greeting, statement of purpose and instructions follows below:

Dear Fellow-Methodist:

As a student at the School of Theology at Claremont, I have written the following questionnaire in order to learn more about the feelings of Methodist laymen and women concerning the communion service. I will greatly appreciate your helping me in this project by completing the questionnaire and returning it to me.

You may mark as many answers to each question as you feel appropriate and please feel free to include additional comments. Your response will be treated with confidence. There is no need to put your name on the questionnaire.

Again, I am very grateful for your help and anxious to receive your ideas and feelings. Please mail the questionnaire to me at the address given below.

Sincerely,

Don K. Finch
1401 North College Avenue
Claremont, California 91711

QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE LORD'S SUPPER

1. Approximately how often is communion observed in your church _____.
2. Within the past 12 months I have attended communion approximately _____ times.
3. When I know communion will be observed I am

{	more interested _____	}	in attending.
	less interested _____		
	no difference _____		
4. Complete the following sentence in any way you wish:
 Participation in a communion service is like _____
 _____.

5. Some thoughts which I have during the communion are _____.
6. Some feelings which I have during the communion service are _____.
7. Check as many of the following which you feel during the communion service:

joy _____	impatience _____
solemnity _____	excitement _____
disinterest _____	loneliness _____
celebration _____	sacrifice _____
sadness _____	boredom _____
anger _____	others _____
fellowship _____	_____
fear _____	_____

8. When the minister reads the invitation ("Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, . . ." etc.), I feel _____.
9. I { usually _____
do not _____ } experience a sense of guilt during some part of the communion service. If I do sense guilt, I { experience _____
do not experience _____ } forgiveness during the service. Additional comments: _____.
10. When I receive and eat the elements I usually feel _____.
11. When I receive and eat the elements I usually feel (check as many as are appropriate):
- united with those in my local church _____
- no unique sense of relationship with others _____
- united with those kneeling or sitting beside me _____
- quite alone _____
- united with all mankind _____
- others _____
12. The most meaningful part of the communion service for me is _____
because _____.

13. In order to make the communion service more meaningful to me I suggest _____¹²⁶

The majority of those responding felt that the Lord's Supper was a meaningful experience for them. About half of these persons, however, were critical of some aspect of the service. The remaining respondents were quite critical of the Lord's Supper and stated that it was not a meaningful experience for them. So that the reader may get some idea of the types of responses to the open-ended statements, some of them are given below. An attempt was made to select representative statements.

Some of the comments by those who feel the Lord's Supper to be meaningful are: "A fresh start or a second chance for things that I haven't been able to conquer or finish"; "Renewing my faith"; "A reminder to live a better life, helping those around who are unable to help themselves"; "Fellowship with others who love God and the church"; "An intensified church service"; "Church within a church"; "Sharing with Jesus as the disciples did at (the) last supper"; A feeling of spiritual uplift by being reminded of Christ's actions before his death"; "Reconsecrating my life to the Lord's service"; "A sense

¹²⁶Much more space was given in the questionnaire for the person to write---from 4 to 8 lines, depending on the question.

of God's great love for us, a realization of Christ's sacrifice to bring us to the Father and an assurance that all are His children"; "A feeling of what a privilege it is to be a Christian and my heart seems to burst with joy when we repeat the fact that He is willing to forgive us and love us just as we should do for others".

Some of these persons were also critical of some aspect of the Lord's Supper. For example, "I do not like the tiny 'waferettes' that are used"; "Communion meant most before it was regimented"; "The new very long service . . . allows no time for meditation"; "We have a big congregation and you have a long wait between segments of the service"; "By doing the same things over and over with no changes makes them become more or less meaningless---and the mind wanders".

Some typical statements from those who said that the Lord's Supper was not meaningful are: "An extremely over-formalized, unmeaningful experience"; "Participating in a ceremony for another time or group of people"; "Indifferent and iconoclastic of an out-moded custom of such a controversial history"; "Droning on about things that intelligent people do not accept as a whole"; "We just felt self-conscious and slightly ridiculous"; "It used to be a parade and as a child I was embarrassed and disliked it".

The results of the remaining questions which called for a single answer, multiple-choice, or check-marks are as follows:

1. Approximately how often is communion observed in your church?

2 times a year	1
3 " " "	3
4 " " "	35
5 " " "	2
6 " " "	6
12 " " "	4
unknown	3
unanswered	6

2. Within the past 12 month I have attended communion approximately _____ times.

0 times	5
1 time	6
2 times	13
3 "	12
4 "	14
5 "	3
6 "	3
unanswered	4

3. When I know communion will be observed I am

{ more interested	<u>22</u>	} in attending.
{ less interested	<u>8</u>	
{ no difference	<u>25</u>	
unanswered	<u>5</u>	

7. Check as many of the following as you feel during the communion service:

joy	<u>18</u>
solemnity	<u>46</u>
disinterest	<u>6</u>
celebration	<u>6</u>
sadness	<u>12</u>
anger	<u>0</u>
fellowship	<u>37</u>
fear	<u>0</u>
impatience	<u>5</u>

others:	
peace	<u>1</u>
frustration	<u>1</u>
hypocrisy	<u>1</u>
reverence	<u>1</u>
love	<u>1</u>
thankfulness	<u>5</u>
blessing	<u>1</u>
uplift	<u>1</u>

excitement 4
 loneliness 11
 sacrifice 13
 boredom 5

rededication 2
 oneness with God 1
 remembrance of Christ 1
 humility 1

9. I { usually 26
 do not 27 } experience a sense of guilt
 unanswered 7

during some part of the communion service. If I do

sense guilt, I { experience 18
 do not experience 9 } forgiveness

during the service.

11. When I receive and eat the elements I usually feel
 (check as many as are appropriate):

united with those in my local church 24
 no unique sense of relationship with others 9
 united with all of mankind 25
 united with those kneeling or sitting beside me 15
 quite alone 11
 united with the church of all times 20
 others:

union with God 1
 closer to God 1
 the body of Christ 1
 united with Christ 2

As was stated previously, we cannot draw any definite conclusions from this study about the present attitude toward and feelings about the Lord's Supper on the part of Methodist laymen, especially in light of the small percentage of questionnaires returned. However, we can make some tentative suggestions about the meaning of the Lord's Supper for those responding. The most common term used to describe their feelings during the communion service was "solemnity", whereas only 14 persons stated that they felt

"joy" and only 5 marked "celebration." Although 37 persons said they felt a sense of fellowship, it is questionable what is meant since the responses to the open-ended questions showed little sense of communion with one another.

This individualism is expressed in many statements of the meaning of communion. For example, "Inwardly appraising myself, thinking of ways to improve myself that I may be worthy of Christ's love and sacrifice for me"; "A renewal of my faith in God"; "Dedicating myself anew to Christ"; "I feel very solemn and sometimes feel a suffering as I try to think what Jesus suffered for me on the cross." It is often just this lack of a true sense of corporate action that is criticized by some of those who felt the Lord's Supper was not meaningful. As one respondent said, the Lord's Supper is like "being alone in a crowd." The two most common answers to Number 12 (the most meaningful part of the service) were "partaking of the elements", which is usually a very individualistic act in Methodism, and "silent meditation". Only two people said that their relationship with other persons was the most meaningful part.

The concept of sacrifice seems deeply imbedded in the Methodist understanding of the Lord's Supper. Although only 13 persons marked "sacrifice" as a feeling during

communion, many others used other words for the idea. Although a remembering of Christ's sacrifice seems to play a part, it is self-sacrifice that is especially important. As one person said, communion is "a renewal of commitments to give up certain things." Taylor also found that a concept of sacrifice was important for a large number of Methodist ministers.¹²⁷

Among those who find communion meaningful, the idea that it is a time for beginning again is common. "Rededication", "renewal", "reconsecration", "reaffirmation"---such words are frequently used. It is seen as a time of self-examination and confession, but it seems to me that there is very little real feeling of forgiveness by God, and the matter of acceptance by one's fellow-Christians does not seem to arise. It is rather a decision to try to do better. The responses to Number 8 (regarding the Invitation) often indicated this: "try harder to live up to Christ's teachings"; "I feel a strong desire to work harder on the love and charity"; "I will try to do better".

In conclusion, a considerable number of those returning the questionnaire stated that the Lord's Supper was meaningless. Those persons who consider the Lord's

¹²⁷Taylor, op. cit., p. 174.

Supper a helpful and worshipful experience tend to view it as a solemn time for individual renewal or rededication, with the idea of self-sacrifice playing an important role. The concept of the Lord's Supper as a corporate act of those present, joyously celebrating their life together in Christ is strikingly absent. The liturgy seems to be little understood and appreciated and the desire for more variety and silent meditation was expressed by many respondents.

CHAPTER III

SUGGESTED PRACTICES FOR THE LORD'S SUPPER TODAY

We shall begin by attempting to summarize what the meaning of the Lord's Supper should be according to our study of the New Testament texts, John Wesley's practice, and the present situation in Methodism. Secondly, we shall examine the Lord's Supper in terms of its symbolic value. Finally, we shall suggest certain practices which will allow the Lord's Supper to be a meaningful event today.

I. THE MEANING ACCORDING TO OUR STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS, JOHN WESLEY'S PRACTICE AND THE CURRENT PRACTICE

Our New Testament study revealed that behind the early church's practice of the Lord's Supper lies a fellowship-meal. Jesus' normal table-fellowship into which he accepts "publicans" and "sinners" is an important part of his life and ministry. After his death his followers come together "to break bread" and in the process come to experience the risen Christ and thus the fellowship meals are continued in a spirit of "gladness" and thanksgiving. Gradually there comes to be a distinction in the early church between the normal and the "sacramental"

meal. The Lord's Supper becomes less a meal and more a ritual of sharing the bread and wine as symbols of the body and blood of Jesus. As those present consume the bread and wine they share in Jesus' death and also share in his power, for they are incorporated into the body of Christ. Jesus' death is seen as an atoning death---as Matthew says, "for the forgiveness of sins" (26:28). It is a deeply personal act for each individual: "This is my body which is for you." (I Cor. 11:24). But it is done for every person. This is what the tradition in Mark 14:24 means: "which is shed for many", for in this instance "many" refers to all people.¹ We also discovered that it is this all-inclusiveness that is most characteristic of Jesus' normal table-fellowship which lies behind the tradition of the Lord's Supper.

What is meaningful in all of these---incorporation into the body of Christ, forgiveness of sins, the invitation to table-fellowship---is that every person is accepted. He is accepted by God and by his fellow-worshippers. Thanksgiving, which is what eucharist means, is his response. Joy is the result, as it was in the "breaking of bread" celebrations in the early church. Fellowship

¹Joachim Jeremias, The Eucharistic Words of Jesus (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), pp. 123-125.

among those present is both the result of their being accepted and the means of this acceptance. There is a strong sense of corporateness---all are a part of the whole body. Hope for a meaningful future is now possible, which is expressed in the tradition that the Lord will return and establish the kingdom of God.

Nor is this acceptance without a demand, both on the individual and on the body as a whole. One of the implications of belonging to an all-inclusive fellowship is that no one must be turned away.

The Eucharist is the Body of Christ offering thanksgiving for creation and redemption to the Father. The implied social doctrine is that man is sheaved into a brotherhood in which all race, class, and status are annihilated but in which the sacredness of the human person is affirmed.²

It was out of the necessity to respect one's fellow-members that Paul reprimanded those who, when they come together, do not wait for each other but go ahead with their one meal, one man being hungry and another drunk (I Cor. 11:21). Just as Christ was revealed in the Emmaus story through the breaking of the bread, it is through the fellowship which each person extends to others that Christ is made manifest

²Wilford Oakland Cross, "Economic and Social Implications of the Eucharist," Massey Hamilton Shepherd, Jr. (ed.) The Eucharist and Liturgical Renewal (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 75.

today. Because each person is a part of the whole body, he must live responsibly if the entire body is to be healthy and effective. Not only must each member respect and share with the other members, but they must extend this acceptance to men everywhere and to share bread with everyone in need.

The practice of the Lord's Supper by John Wesley indicates very much the same meaning as we discovered in the New Testament. The Lord's Supper reminds Wesley of the atoning death of Christ and the fact that his sins are forgiven. It not only reminds him of the once-for-all and all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ but the Eucharist is a means by which a person can experience the effects of this act of love. Starkey says that in the Lord's Supper God is assuring us that we are accepted.³ As a result we joyously give thanks to God for our salvation and our souls are strengthened and refreshed. The eschatological aspect is clearly present for Wesley, who believes that the Lord's Supper is both a foretaste and a pledge of things to come.

The Eucharist is not an individualistic matter for Wesley, who sees it as the communion of saints---a

³Lycurgus M. Starkey, Jr., The Work of the Holy Spirit (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 96.

corporate act on the part of the church. This is why he changed the pronouncement of absolution into a petition by the congregation. It is also one reason for the emphasis on the singing of the congregation.

Wesley also has a firm conviction in the ethical implications of the Lord's Supper. We are called upon to sacrifice our entire selves to God. That we must relate responsibly to our fellow-men is evidenced in the proceedings of the love-feast, which he considers related to the Lord's Supper. Here the members share with each other and help sustain one another. But the societies are not in-grown and all are welcome to the Lord's Supper who are earnest seekers and a collection is taken for the poor of the community.

We can generalize and say that it does seem that for Wesley the emphasis is on sorrowfully remembering the atoning sacrifice of Christ, experiencing the forgiveness of sins and joyfully sacrificing oneself and one's possessions to God, rather than on the joyous celebration of Christ's presence in the fellowship of eating and drinking together. However, this is only a matter of emphasis, for certainly the latter aspects are present, especially in the small cell-groups of the societies, but also in the Eucharistic celebrations. It is also true that very quickly in the early church the Lord's Supper came to

emphasize the solemn remembering of Christ's atoning death rather than the joyful celebration of his presence and anticipated coming. When Wesley's practice is compared with the observance of the Lord's Supper before him, we can say that Wesley even helped to bring a sense of corporate and joyful participation in the service.

At first glance it appears that the changes in the practice of the Lord's Supper which take place after Wesley also help to balance the meaning by emphasizing the fellowship among those present rather than the atoning sacrifice of Christ for the individual believer. It is true that there has been a hesitancy to use the sacrificial terminology---to say that we eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus Christ is offensive to many men today. The historic statements concerning man's sinfulness and the subjective hymns which speak of Christ's bloody sacrifice have also been increasingly rejected as being out of place today.

But the effect of such changes has not been to facilitate a sense of corporate joy and fellowship so much as to make the Lord's Supper into a solemn time of individual decision to lead a better life. Without a sense of the "effectiveness" of Christ's death and resurrection, the worshippers are not able to join in it---that is, to die themselves as they eat the flesh and blood of the

crucified Jesus and to live again with new life and power as they incorporate within themselves the risen Christ.

In conclusion, the practice of the Lord's Supper for many Methodists today has lost much of the joy and fellowship which was present in the eucharistic celebrations of the early church and which we see reflected in the practice of John Wesley. The attempts since Wesley to "liberalize" the ritual have merely turned the Lord's Supper into a solemn time of introspection and individual decision to lead a better life. The problem which faces us is how to allow the Lord's Supper to become again a joyous time of acceptance, thanksgiving, fellowship, and a time of ethical demand.

II. THE SYMBOLIC VALUE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Lord's Supper has deep symbolical meaning for the early church and for John Wesley. We noticed in Chapter I that Jesus' acceptance of "publicans" and "sinners" into table-fellowship is symbolic of his acceptance of all persons irrespective of their race, color, ethical conduct, etc., into his fellowship. After Jesus' death the early Christians experienced Christ's presence in their meals together. Thus as the early church increasingly came to view Christ as being in the Lord's Supper in a special way, we have the development of the sacrament.

A sacrament is any physiological act through which there is a communion with the sacred.⁴ Research into the history of religions indicates that

(1) the sacrament is the sublimation of some of the simplest and most elementary of life's functions: washing, eating and drinking, sex intercourse, gestures, speaking; and it is their sublimation because in the sacrament this vital activity is disclosed from its profoundest bases upwards to where it touches the divine. Thus life itself, in its whole extent, is as it were brought into the presence of Power. But (2) . . . this Power now becomes bound up with the action, under the form of the saviour.⁵

Thus the breaking of the bread and the pouring of the wine are on the one hand mere utilitarian acts needed to distribute the bread; on the other hand they represent for the early Christians the death of Jesus. Whereas consuming the bread and wine is merely a necessary process in order to stay alive, it is in this setting a sharing in the life and power of the risen Lord. As the participants share and eat together they are not only or even primarily nourishing their bodies, but engaging in fellowship with each other and their Lord who is felt to be present.

Consuming the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper

⁴Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959), p. 14.

⁵G. Van Der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938), p. 365.

is for the early church truly a symbolical act. According to Susanne K. Langer a sign merely points to something; it ". . . indicates the existence---past, present, or future---of a thing, event or condition."⁶ Man, however, ". . . unlike all other animals, uses 'signs' not only to indicate things, but also to represent them",⁷ which is the process of symbolization. Cyril C. Richardson agrees as to the importance of symbols to man and says,

. . . Symbols are the primary mode of our becoming aware of things. They are the way we register meanings in our depths. Far from being unnecessary, they are the first means we have of apprehending things; and the symbols, which the unconscious throws up, dominate our ways of acting. . . . Indeed, most of reality is not accessible to us without symbols; for it is by symbols that we come into contact with it. What the symbol does is to give reality meaning, so that we can participate in it.⁸

Richardson points out that "symbol" comes from the Greek verb symbollo, "to bring together",⁹ and says of a symbol, "Perhaps its most marked characteristic is its capacity to comprehend an almost infinite variety of meanings and relationships."¹⁰

⁶Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key (New York: New American Library, 1948), p. 58.

⁷Ibid., p. 37.

⁸Cyril C. Richardson, "The Foundations of Christian Symbolism," in F. Ernest Johnson (ed.) Religious Symbolism (New York: Institute for Religious and Social Studies, 1955), p. 2.

⁹Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 5.

The symbolism of eating and drinking is extremely powerful and gripping and is connected with the whole life cycle of creation.

It expresses in the deepest way the idea of participation. One becomes what one eats, and food is the very source of one's existence. It is for these reasons that feasting has always played a large role in cult practices. It is the bond which unites a fellowship with the closest ties . . .¹¹

The sacred meal, which becomes a sacrament when connected with the "Lord" of the cult, is very common among the so-called savior-religions or mystery religions.¹² In all of these meals a sacred food and/or drink is consumed and thereby a bond is established between the participant and the "Lord."

This is not to say of course that the Lord's Supper was influenced by parallel sacred meals or that they are the same. The Lord's Supper is a direct outgrowth of specific historical events: Jesus' normal table-fellowship and the fellowship meals of the early church in which the disciples experienced the risen Christ. The Eucharist is different from the sacred meals of the mystery religions because the Lord who is present at the Lord's Supper is he with whom the early Christians had so often sat at table during his earthly life.¹³ Therefore, the main reason

¹¹Ibid., p. 15.

¹²Leeuw, op. cit., p. 366.

¹³Ibid., p. 367.

that eating the bread and drinking the wine are meaningful symbols for the early church is due to the common history of the participants. In other words, because they have in common the experience and memory of eating together with Jesus before his death, the fellowship meal was full of symbolism after the crucifixion. The meal re-presented this previous experience. Gradually the breaking of the bread and pouring out of the wine became symbolic of Jesus' death and the consuming of the bread and wine represented participation in his death and his life and power. As the ritual became more and more developed, further symbolism was found in the sacrament.

Although the Christian faith is based on historical events and it is these events which guarantee the validity of the symbolism, it is still helpful to refer to sacred meals in other cultures as an indication of the powerful symbolism of eating and drinking. As Mircea Eliade says, "History cannot basically modify the structure of an archaic symbolism. History constantly adds new meanings, but they do not destroy the structure of the symbol."¹⁴

In primitive cultures feasting is closely related to sacrifice. As Cyril Richardson says, ". . . The sacrificial imagery implied in the slaying of animals finds its

¹⁴Eliade, op. cit., p. 137.

consummation in the banquet that follows."¹⁵ Of course sacrifice is not a part of the Lord's Supper in the early church. However, we have seen that quite early in the tradition Jesus' death was seen as being "for many" and, as Matthew says, "for the forgiveness of sins". Certainly in the history of the church the concept of sacrifice came to be a central part of the Lord's Supper. It is an essential concept for Wesley, though of course in a way different from Roman Catholicism. For Wesley, Jesus' death was the once-for-all and all-sufficient sacrifice and we join that sacrifice by offering ourselves and our possessions for the service of God.

Therefore, it does appear that the urge to join with others in the fellowship of a ritual meal is closely related to the urge to sacrifice and to offer up this sacrifice to the god or gods. There is in addition to the desire to join in the festal meal, a desire to participate in the sacrifice, as Wesley indicates by the section of hymns entitled, "Concerning the sacrifice of our persons." We may say that we need to die symbolically so that we may join in the fellowship which follows. As Frederick Dillistone says,

¹⁵Richardson, op. cit., p. 15.

On the one side there is the urge to accept death, to be immolated (symbolically) in order that the current of life may continue to flow; on the other side there is the urge to grasp life, to slay (symbolically) a victim in order that its life may be made available. Deep down these two urges interact and both find their appropriate outlets in and through the varying forms of sacrificial ritual.

As social patterns develop and become more stable, these streams of sacrificial motivation find expression on the one side in the oblation. This is the channel through which the flow of total life is continuously renewed by passing through symbolic death. On the other side there is the sacred meal which forms the occasion at which the life of a particular society is enhanced by its members sharing the life of a victim which has been handed over to death.¹⁶

It was no accident that bread and wine came to be the food which is shared and eaten. In the first place, bread and wine were no doubt consumed often by Jesus and his table-companions during his lifetime. But it is also evident that these substances appealed to the imagination of the early church as symbols of the body and blood of Christ. As the bread is broken so Jesus' body was broken; as the wine is poured out so Jesus' blood was poured out. As the presence of Christ came to be experienced during the fellowship meals, the power of his life-death-resurrection was felt to be present. Thus the breaking of the bread and the pouring of the wine and their distribution and consumption re-presented his death and life-giving power.

¹⁶Frederick William Dillistone, Christianity and Symbolism (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 247.

It is not surprising that bread and wine are often the sacred food in the sacramental meals of the mystery religions.¹⁷ These substances are uniquely suited to represent the source of all life and therefore that which is broken, shared and consumed. As Alan Watts says,

Bread and wine are respectively the staple food and drink of men, and thus the substance of human life. Yet before they become food, the wheat and the grapes undergo a transformation: they are ground and crushed, baked and fermented, and in this they typify the strangest and most problematic aspect of life itself. For every form of life exists at the expense of some other form, the whole living world constituting a colossal cannibalism, a holocaust in which life continues only at the cost of death.¹⁸

As products of wheat and grapes, bread and wine symbolize God's gift of life to man. But because the natural products have been transformed, bread and wine also represent that which is fully enmeshed in the life of humanity. The very incorporation of these products by eating them provides life for man. Therefore, although the use of bread and wine in the table-fellowship of Jesus is the main reason for its use in the Lord's Supper and is the predominate source of symbolic value, the natural symbolism of bread and wine is also present.

¹⁷Leeuw, op. cit., p. 366.

¹⁸Alan W. Watts, Myth and Ritual in Christianity (New York: Vanguard Press, 1953), pp. 146-147.

Although the Lord's Supper had great symbolic value for early Christians and for John Wesley, this is certainly less true today. Symbols often, through dissolution, lose their inner power and become at best mere signs---pointing to something but unable to convey the meaning they once expressed, being without an inherent power of their own.¹⁹ Certainly the loss of meaningful symbols is characteristic of the present technological and scientific age in which man ". . . has learned to esteem signs above symbols, to suppress his emotional reactions in favor of practical ones and make use of nature instead of holding so much of it sacred."²⁰ Referring to such an age, Dillistone says,

The symbolic significance of the home decays; it becomes simply a dormitory in which the tired industrial worker can relax and sleep. The symbolic character of the meeting wanes; it becomes simply the occasion for determining the respective policies of management and labour in the industrial realm. The symbolism of water disappears; it is hidden in tanks and pipes and drawn from taps when needed for particular purposes. . . . The symbolism of fire loses its appeal; fire is now chiefly the hidden agent to release energy for industrial processes. Birth and death and rebirth have little significance within a dominantly mechanical context.²¹

¹⁹Paul Tillich, "The Religious Symbol," in Rollo May (ed.), Symbolism in Religion and Literature (New York: Braziller, 1960), p. 76.

²⁰Langer, op. cit., p. 235.

²¹Dillistone, op. cit., p. 292.

It is therefore not surprising that the Lord's Supper has lost much of its symbolical value for modern man. For us bread does not come from grain but from the store wrapped in celophane. In fact we seldom see a whole loaf of bread ---that is, one which has not already been domestically sliced! Few of us have seen grapes harvested and the process by which wine is made.

Closely tied up with the loss of symbolism in the Lord's Supper is the reaction of Protestantism against what were considered to be the abuses of the sacrament by the Roman Catholic Church. It is claimed by some that the Reformers practically destroyed its mysterious and awe-inspiring qualities by attempting to strip the mass of its scandal. For example, Tillich says, "The Calvinist criticism of the mass (as 'accursed idolatry') forces it into the demonic and makes the eucharist a mere 'pointing' symbol: the beginning of its disappearance."²² Rather than blaming the Reformers, it is probably better to say that they were merely making clear a loss of symbolism which had already taken place. Tillich says elsewhere that symbols cannot be cast aside at will---they only disappear when they lose their inner power.²³ Carl Jung recognizes

²²Tillich, op. cit., p. 95.

²³Ibid., p. 76.

this when he claims that the collapse of our symbols is a sign of life; once they are dead, they might as well be stripped from us.²⁴

As was pointed out in connection with the influence of Jesus' normal table-fellowship on the Lord's Supper, common experience on the part of the participants is extremely important in imparting symbolic value to an event. But there have been infrequent and poorly attended celebrations of the Lord's Supper in American Methodism for many decades for many different reasons, including the reaction to the Roman Catholic mass, the advent of a highly rationalistic and critical attitude toward the sacraments, and the influence of the doctrine of self-sufficiency and individualism. For those who have participated in the service it has not been so much a corporate celebration by the church as it has been a time of individual dedication. Therefore, it is little wonder that the Lord's Supper has lost symbolic value when there is little common experience and fellowship among the participants.

Despite the loss of traditional symbolism, modern man has a need to re-present the significant experiences of life in various ways. Because man is by nature a

²⁴Carl G. Jung, The Integration of the Personality (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1939), p. 61.

symbol-making creature, new symbols will rise to take the place of decaying ones. For example, the word "metropolis" does much more than signify a highly populated urban complex; depending on one's experiences in the city it also symbolizes economic power, slums, sexual freedom, etc.²⁵ Symbolization is necessary if man is to make sense out of his life and his environment. The organization of events into rituals has symbolic value itself, for it helps man to see order in the chaos of life.

Ritual is a symbolic transformation of experiences that no other medium can adequately express. Because it springs from a primary need, it is a spontaneous activity---that is to say, it arises without intention, without adaption to a conscious purpose; its growth is undesigned, its pattern purely natural, however intricate it may be.²⁶

There are many examples of secular rituals in the world of sports---for example, the invariable singing of the Star Spangled Banner before a baseball game and the standing for the 7th inning stretch.

The question then is not whether symbolic events are necessary for modern man but whether the ritual of the Lord's Supper (the objects, the words, the action) which was meaningful for the early church and for John Wesley can be a significant experience for us today. It is my opinion that it can be, but the church will not make it so

²⁵Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: Macmillan, 1965).

²⁶Langer, op. cit., p. 52.

by "handing down" the prescribed practice and doctrine.

It is for this reason that Stanley R. Hopper lists as one criteria for the recovery of symbols, "The question of the context, whether it is hierarchical or dramatic."²⁷

Instead of mystical withdrawal and otherworldly absorption, its movement is one of engagement in the world; instead of union its goal is communion, instead of mediation of the priest, the Christ of the Gospels becomes the Paradigm.²⁸

We need today more than ever before an event which symbolizes the source and purpose of our life and the opportunity to act out this meaning in a ritual act. There is no such symbol present in our culture. As Dillistone says,

. . . Is there any blood-symbol of giving and receiving, of personal meeting and personal commitment, of common devotion to a common aim which is widely used in contemporary life? It is difficult to think of any such, even in the trades-union groups which are probably the most powerful social organizations of modern life.²⁹

The Eucharist can again provide us with such a symbol.

The Lord's Supper can provide contemporary man with a means of symbolically expressing the two urges which are closely related in primitive cultures---sacrificial death and feasting. Christ's death is re-presented and because

²⁷Stanley Romaine Hopper, "The Future of Religious Symbolism---A Protestant View," in Johnson op. cit., p. 238

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Dillistone, op. cit., p. 303.

of his death and resurrection the fellowship meal takes place. Thus the process of death and life is in a sense reenacted for modern man and given meaning. Although bread and wine are far removed from the processes of nature for most of us, they still can re-present to a certain extent the source of life, especially when large loaves of leavened bread are used.

Eating the bread and drinking the wine can represent the source of life in another way. Consuming food is a basic physiological act and one of the first things which a new-born baby does is eat. The feeding of the Lord's Supper can therefore symbolize the earliest experiences of life and the source of life. From a psychoanalytical point of view the feeding in the Eucharist can represent the good mother.³⁰ The sharing of food in the Lord's Supper is a

³⁰Joseph A. Erickson, Jr., "The Imagery and Symbolism of the Holy Eucharist in Pastoral Counseling" (Unpublished Th.D. Dissertation, School of Theology, Claremont, California: 1965), pp. 29-30. Erickson is helpful in pointing out that because infantile experiences are represented, "bad" feelings such as rage can arise, as well as good feelings. For a discussion of the presence of both positive and negative feelings in the infant, see Melanie Klein, Envy and Gratitude (New York: Basic Books, 1957). Both Erickson and Margaretta K. Bowers, Conflicts of the Clergy (New York: Nelson, 1963), contain case studies of persons who experienced severe negative reactions of rage, anger, hostility, etc., during the communion service. However, the Lord's Supper can provide a means of working through these negative feelings as well as the positive ones.

means of supporting and nurturing each other. In such a supportive and giving atmosphere the participants are enabled to work through some basic human conflicts. That is, not only do infantile feelings come to the surface, but a means is provided for dealing with these feelings. Rollo May calls these two aspects the integrating, healing power of symbols.

This power resides, on one hand, in the fact that the symbol and myth elicit and bring into awareness the repressed, unconscious, archaic urges, longings, dreads and other psychic content. This is the regressive function of symbols and myths. But on the other hand, the symbol and myth reveal new goals, new ethical insights and possibilities; they are a breaking through of greater meaning which was not present before. The symbol and myth in this respect are ways of working out the problem on a higher level of integration. This we call the progressive function of symbols and myths.³¹

By representing the early experiences of life within a supportive atmosphere, the Lord's Supper can provide contemporary man with a symbolic act which has both a regressive and progressive function.

In order to make the Lord's Supper a meaningful symbol today we must recover those essential aspects which we found to be of primary importance for the early church and for Wesley. This will not happen easily nor quickly. However, by regularly engaging in a ritual fellowship

³¹Rollo May, "The Significance of Symbols," in his Symbolism in Religion and Literature, p. 95.

meal, hopefully such an event will gradually attain symbolic value for the participants. If the ethical implications of the act are correctly drawn which they must be if it is to truly be the Lord's Supper, society as a whole will feel the repercussions. In other words, although the Lord's Supper will only be a living symbol for the participants, the entire scientific and technological age in which we live can be affected.

III. SUGGESTED PRACTICES FOR TODAY

We can make several suggestions as to how the Lord's Supper might be made more meaningful to contemporary man and to local Methodist congregations in particular. The first thing that needs to be said is that there is certainly no one correct and only way to conduct the Lord's Supper. A cursory survey of the many different forms of the Eucharist which are in existence today, not to mention its various manifestations throughout the history of the church, is sufficient warning against any dogmatic assertions in this regard. Nor should there be any one form which is the only correct way to conduct the Lord's Supper. It is quite possible that by varying the form of the service it can be made more meaningful to some persons and can provide for different types of experiences for everyone. Many persons who have never before found the Lord's Supper

worthwhile discover that it becomes extremely meaningful at the end of a conference or retreat. Household utensils and common bread and juice are used, and it culminates and symbolizes the common experiences in which they have participated for several days. John A. T. Robinson in his book Liturgy Coming to Life, to which we shall refer several more times in this section, says that local experiment is vital if the Lord's Supper is to become meaningful today.³²

Such flexibility is one means of restoring the sense of spontaneity and joyous fellowship which is of so great importance in the Lord's Supper of the early church and of John Wesley. When it is felt that there is only one exact and proper way to conduct the service, so much attention is given to the observance of the ritual that much of the essential meaning is lost. Several respondents to the questionnaire illustrated this by commenting that they felt the Lord's Supper to be a "success" when the minister and ushers performed their parts perfectly and the mechanics of the service worked smoothly.

By observing the Lord's Supper in a different setting and in a concise form, some of the solemnity and "magical" connotations can be broken down. For example,

³²John A. T. Robinson, Liturgy Coming to Life (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), p. vi.

why not precede a church dinner with a brief celebration of the eucharist? In this way the natural gaiety with which such occasions are enjoyed can be caught up and used in the sacrament. The connection between the Lord's Supper and table-fellowship is made clearer. When the Lord's Supper replaces the grace which is normally said or sung and when the meal begins immediately afterwards on the same table and with the same cups, the direct relationship between the sacrament and our everyday lives is illustrated.

Small groups within a local church, such as church school classes, Bible study groups, official boards, committees, and therapy groups, can celebrate the Lord's Supper together. Their common experiences as a group can serve to make the celebration a meaningful event. The Eucharist can in turn bring purpose and direction to their life together. Christ Church Presbyterian in Burlington, Vermont considers the small groups in which the congregation finds itself in mission to be the normative institutional structure and has abandoned the regular Sunday morning worship service.³³ Each group carries out the

³³The Church for Others (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1967), pp. 127-129. Although the regular Sunday morning worship service was abandoned, it should be said that the entire congregation gathers once a month for an all-day period of worship, study, celebration, and strategy planning.

liturgical functions of worship, including the Lord's Supper, and the form, time, and place are those which each group feels is appropriate for them.

It is not recommended that every congregation follow the example of Christ Church---this is not desirable nor possible. Each local church must decide on a form of worship which is appropriate for the situation in which it exists. Besides, the traditional practices of the institutional church do not change quickly. Because of this and the fact that there are values derived from a more formal order of worship, we need to make some suggestions regarding the typical celebration of the Lord's Supper in a local Methodist church.

Generally speaking, there are great benefits to be derived from placing the central action of the Lord's Supper within a formal, liturgical framework. It is not merely the breaking of the bread and the pouring out of the wine and their distribution and consumption within the context of table-fellowship that have symbolic value. The whole service is dramatic---like a play it has the opening, the main act, and the closing. Ceremony is symbolic of God's order and man needs to see order in the chaos of his life.³⁴

³⁴Erickson, op. cit., p. 83.

The liturgy of the Communion shares with other dramatic forms, in its action as well as language, the opportunity of revealing the truth of the living myth. It is this myth which brings man life, and without which he seems to perish spiritually and emotionally.³⁵

The vestments worn by the clergy can be an important part of the drama. Because they are the form of yesterday they represent the "historicness" of the rite---they help to bridge the gap between the past and present.³⁶ The vestments are also significant in another way. Since the eating and drinking of the rite represent early childhood experiences, those persons participating in the rite represent parent-figures. This is especially true of the minister and by wearing robes he symbolizes both parents and thus facilitates the communicant's transference feelings which are a part of the working through of inner psychic conflicts.³⁷

The music is also important. The enthusiastic and joyful singing of hymns by the congregation is an opportunity for the individuals and the body as a whole to praise and thank God. It gives the persons an outlet for their emotions and it represents the corporate nature of the Lord's Supper. The present rejection of many of the subjective hymns which stressed personal sin and worthlessness is probably a good sign, for they over-loaded the

³⁵Ibid., p. 59. ³⁶Ibid., p. 84. ³⁷Ibid., p. 85.

worshiper with guilt feelings and fostered his innate masochism.³⁸ They did not serve to make him aware of real guilt but to create neurotic guilt. However, congregational hymn-singing is important and Methodists need to hold on to their tradition of being a singing people.

There are other ways in which music can be an important part of the service. As a dramatic form it can be used to represent certain ideas, moods, feelings in a creative way, especially by a trained choir. Also, chanting the creeds

. . . allows the mythic content of the Service to be expressed more easily. Chanting the creeds removes these faith statements somewhat from the literal dogmatic position they appear to have when said.³⁹

The location of the communion table and the position of the minister is also important. Although Wesley followed the Anglican and Roman Catholic tradition of placing the table against the pulpit or wall and having the minister stand at the front or side, the practice of the early church is of course quite different. By having the table set out from the wall, the participants can gather around the table to share the bread and wine and thus emphasize the importance of table-fellowship. If it is not practical to have the communicants completely surround the table, the minister can at least stand behind the table

³⁸Ibid., p. 88.

³⁹Ibid., p. 87.

and face the people. In discussing the symbolism of the position of the table and the minister, Bishop Robinson says,

The effect of the eastward position at the Eucharist, with the priest leading the Liturgy with his back to the people, is, pictorially speaking, to focus attention upon a point "out there" towards which the worship of priest and people is directed. The psychological effect of the westward position is different. It is to focus attention upon a point in the middle, as the Christ comes to stand among his people as the breaker of bread, and to direct their gaze upwards as they lift their hearts to him as their ascended Lord.⁴⁰

In this way it is represented that the service is not something which the priest "puts on" but is an action of the total body of Christ.⁴¹

The type of bread and wine used is also significant. They should be recognizable as products of wheat and grape if they are to represent to man the processes of nature and the source of life. But it should be evident that they are fully enmeshed in the life of humanity. The use of ordinary bread and wine has the value of symbolizing

. . . that the samples we offer must genuinely stand for our lives, as a community and as individuals; otherwise it is not our real selves that we are asking Christ to deal with and to consecrate as the materials of his kingdom.⁴²

As E. W. Southcott says, "In the Communion service our Lord takes the ordinary food and drink of the day, as a

⁴⁰John A.T. Robinson, op. cit., p. 27.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 20-21.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 34-35.

means whereby He comes anew to recreate and redeem and renew."⁴³ The bread and wine should represent our social, industrial and economic life and will therefore be both good and bad.⁴⁴ It may be that worshippers can bring their own bread or that the women of the parish can bake bread.

When possible, the use of real wine in communion is to be preferred over grape juice. Wine has been used by many different cultures from ancient time to the present in connection with their religious rites.⁴⁵ One of the effects of alcohol is that it causes one to feel for a time that he is at one with himself, with others and with nature.⁴⁶ As Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., says,

It was undoubtedly because of its power to give experiences of the ecstatic and the transcendent that alcohol found such widespread use as a symbol of these elements in religion. Wine, it should be noted, was and is often used in those religious rites and festivals related to the mysteries of man's existence, such as birth, marriage and death. The roots of such practices are deep. That they have survived through the centuries attests to their functional value as meaningful symbols for the participants.⁴⁷

⁴³E. W. Southcott, The Parish Comes Alive (London: Mowbray, 1956), p. 37.

⁴⁴Cross, op. cit., p. 80.

⁴⁵Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., "Philosophical-Religious Factors in the Etiology and Treatment of Alcoholism," Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol, XXIV:3 (September 1963), 474.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 476.

⁴⁷Ibid.

It is realized of course that any attempt to introduce the use of wine into the Lord's Supper in most Methodist churches at the present time would prove to be so disruptive that it would probably be more of a hindrance than a help. Taylor found that only 4% of the Methodist ministers responding to his questionnaire said that wine was used in the communion service at their churches.⁴⁸ I suspect that the percentage of Methodist churches using wine is even lower than that. Nevertheless, it is something to move toward, not only because of its power to facilitate a sense of unity, but because, as Clinebell says, "There is some evidence that the ritual uses of alcohol may actually deter the development of alcoholism in certain cultures (among orthodox Jews, for example)."⁴⁹ By associating alcohol with the mysteries of life and the ritual ways of handling them, man seems to maintain the ability to control its use.⁵⁰

It is important psychologically to have large pieces of leavened bread and plenty of wine. Thin plastic-like wafers and a miserly portion of wine symbolize stinginess

⁴⁸Michael J. Taylor, The Protestant Liturgical Renewal (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1963), p. 183.

⁴⁹Clinebell, op. cit., footnote, p. 474.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 476.

and the ungiving mother. Leavened bread and ample wine represent nourishment to the participants and give them something substantial to share. This gives the worshipper the opportunity to bite into and chew the bread heartily and to drink deeply from the chalice. Loaves and a common cup also symbolize the corporate, rather than individualistic, nature of the act.

In addition to experimenting with abbreviated forms of the order of worship for the Lord's Supper in different settings, there are benefits to be derived from using on Sunday morning an order of worship much like that used by John Wesley. This liturgy contains within it those necessary dimensions of the Lord's Supper which we have previously discussed. By maintaining the twofold division of the Service of the Word and the Service of the Lord's Supper, we are following an ancient tradition which can be a point of contact in the Church's attempts at ecumenicity. What is more important, it provides a necessary psychological break in the service. When an attempt is made to merge the preaching of the word and the communion into one unit, as is done in The Book of Worship of the Methodist Church, 1964, the service is too long to sustain interest and involvement. It is best for there to be two dramatic events---the preaching of the Word and the partaking of the elements---each drama having its opening, climax and

closing. It is for this reason that Bishop Robinson recommends that the setting apart of the bread and wine be delayed until the beginning of the Eucharistic dialogue.⁵¹

The liturgy of the Word then runs straight on without a break from the sermon, notices and biddings into the intercession and communion preparation. Then if the offertory hymn is sung and the bread and wine brought up, the four-fold action of the Eucharist follows swiftly, compactly and without interruption.⁵²

In the first part of the service the saving event of Jesus Christ can be proclaimed. Specifically, it is an opportunity to discuss the meaning of the Lord's Supper---its form and significance in the early church and its roots in Jesus' table-fellowship, the practice and doctrine of Wesley, its importance for us today. It is a time to announce what the essential elements are: acceptance, thanksgiving, joy, fellowship, hope, corporateness and demand. The social and ethical implications must be drawn in urgent and concrete terms. We must not only accept all men into our fellowship, but we must provide them with bread, both literally and figuratively. Millions of people around the globe are in desperate need of enough food to stay alive and it is imperative that we share our abundance. We are also called on to share the "bread of life" with all men (cf. Matthew 4:3-4)---the good news of the

⁵¹Robinson, op. cit., p. vi.

⁵²Ibid.

gospel without which we are as dead men.

Whereas the first part of the service involves the proclamation of the saving event in language, the Lord's Supper is essentially a demonstration of the gospel. It is the meeting of a community to break bread together with their Lord. At the Lord's Supper we celebrate and set forth what Christ has done for us, set forward what he has done in us by the union of our lives with his, and offer ourselves as the instruments of his action through us.⁵³ The Lord's Supper can take the form of the fourfold action of taking, blessing, breaking and sharing (" . . . he took bread and having said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them . . ." Mark 14:22). Bishop Robinson suggests that by emphasizing what is done rather than what is said, the ancient liturgy can be meaningful for contemporary man.⁵⁴ Thus, a typical order of worship might be the following:⁵⁵

THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Liturgy of the Word

Call to Worship

Hymn

⁵³Ibid., p. 19.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. v.

⁵⁵The organization of the "breaking of the bread" into the four-fold action follows Robinson, op. cit., pp. 79-107. The order is basically that of Wesley's except that the Lord's Prayer after the communion is omitted and in its place is the Prayer of Oblation or the Prayer of Thanksgiving.

Lord's Prayer

Collect for Purity

Ten Commandments or Summary of the Law

Collect for the Day

Epistle

Gospel

Hymn

Sermon

Notices

The Breaking of the Bread

The First Action - TAKING

Offertory Sentences

Hymn

Offertory Prayer

Preparation

Prayer for Christ's Church

Invitation

Confession

Prayer for Pardon

Comfortable Words

The Second Action - BLESSING

Sursum Corda

Preface

Sanctus

Prayer of Humble Access

Prayer of Consecration

The Third Action - BREAKING

Fraction

The Fourth Action - SHARING

Communion

Prayer of Oblation or Prayer of Thanksgiving

Gloria in Excelsis

Hymn

Blessing

The first action, taking, is the taking or offering up of the bread and wine, the raw material of the eucharistic action.⁵⁶ It is especially important that this be seen as an act of the laity, for it is the bringing of the products of our every-day living---symbolic of our whole selves---to God for consecration.

. . . In the offertory we are simply taking a dip into the world and lifting out of it a sample of the common livelihood of man---a loaf of bread and a bottle of drink Into that loaf of bread goes the whole working life of the world---all the complicated processes of production, distribution and exchange. And in the bottle of wine we have the symbol of all life's joy and leisure, everything given to make glad and free the heart of man. All that we take, as it were, off the table of our daily lives, and we place it in the hands of Christ for him to transform and use.⁵⁷

Thus it is appropriate that representatives of the laity bring the bread and wine, together with the alms,

⁵⁶Robinson, op. cit., p. 61.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 62.

and place them on the table.

Because the material which we have offered to God is both good and bad---unredeemed---the second act is that of blessing or consecration.⁵⁸ By blessing and giving thanks to God our products, and therefore our whole selves, are restored to the right relationship with God. That transformation of ourselves is begun which has as its goal the conforming of the whole world to Christ's glorious body.⁵⁹

The breaking of bread, the third action of the Eucharist, is in itself ". . . a simple and insignificant process required purely for the purpose of distribution---like cutting the loaf at meals."⁶⁰ But it represents the self-sacrifice of Jesus for our redemption and it is also symbolic of our sacrifice, for as we eat the bread it becomes part of us and we become part of the loaf---the body of Christ. The fraction is the recognition ". . . that the life of God can be given and shared, only if it is broken and poured out."⁶¹

But the drama does not end there, for the cup of death is also the cup of life, and the act of communion is resurrection from the dead.⁶² The fourth act is the

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 64.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 65.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 65-66. ⁶¹Ibid., p. 68. ⁶²Ibid., p. 69.

sharing and eating together the bread and wine. The high point of the service is the joyous fellowship of feeding, which is essentially a corporate act. "It is one and the same Greek word, koinonia, which we translate variously as participation, communion, fellowship, community."⁶³ It is essential that when the elements are distributed and consumed, everything be done to emphasize the joy, corporateness, fellowship and sharing of the occasion. This act is at the same time deeply personal.

It is one of the deep mysteries of the truth as it is in Jesus that there is no contradiction or even antithesis here between the personal and the social. My personality is most whole, most free, most truly my own, when and as I come to find myself in Christ, which means inextricably for the New Testament in the Body of Christ, the fellowship of the redeemed.⁶⁴

The sharing in the Lord's Supper is not an end in itself. We have come together as the body of Christ, offered ourselves up and been fed. In an important sense the action really begins with the dismissal from the table: Now we must scatter again to share with others what has been done for us and to us in this fellowship meal. This is why we say in the Prayer of Thanksgiving after the communion, "that we may continue in that holy fellowship."⁶⁵ We go forth to put into effect the transforming powers which we have known in the Lord's Supper.

⁶³Ibid., p. 68. ⁶⁴Ibid., p. 69. ⁶⁵Ibid., p. 105.

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